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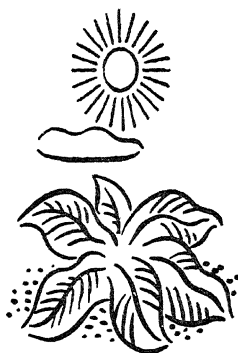
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THE OUTSIDE LEAF

THE OUTSIDE LEAF



by

BEN FIELD

REYNAL & HITCHCOCK

NEW YORK

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For My Father,

TEACHER AND LOVER OF HIS PEOPLE

Author's Note

THE CULTIVATION of such staple American crops as cotton, corn, and wheat is fairly well known, but few of us know that much of our cigar tobacco is raised up North or have more than the haziest notion of how it is grown. And since the lives of the people in *The Outside Leaf* are tied up with broadleaf tobacco, some readers might like to have, before beginning the story, a quick, running account of its cultivation and handling from seed bed to and through the curing barn. Broadleaf is the wide-skirted, drooping tobacco that blooms on the hills, terraces, and flats along the Connecticut River.

When the shad run up the river and the peepers sing in the swamps and marshes, the broadleaf farmer prepares for his seeding. He gets his long narrow seed beds ready, and puts on them a heavy coat of swamp soil. For their protection, he locates the beds on the more genial side of barns or other buildings, or by woods on the north or west, or on a south slope, in a nook in the woods, or in a hollow.

In the old days he covered his beds with birch brush or cloth; now he relies on removable glass sash, each sash six feet long and three feet wide. Glass brings up the plants quicker and keeps out best the wind and the cold rains of early spring.

Before the farmer sows his seed, he must steam his beds. Most farmers hire a steamer which makes the rounds the

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way the old-fashioned threshing rig did years ago. The steamer consists of a boiler (I have seen an old fire engine used for this), a set of pipes, and an inverted iron pan. Steam is forced through the pipes into the pan which is clamped down on the seed bed, penetrating and heating the soil until it is hot enough to cook an egg. The steam kills fungus growth and weed and insect and angle worm.

The farmer has saved the fine brown seed from a few of last year's sturdiest plants. He tests this seed, blowing out chaff and other light stuff. He uses dry seed or seed that has already sprouted or both, sprouting it by keeping it moist and warm, mixing it with rotten apple-wood. He may keep it in a wet sock for sprouting. When the young white sprouts break out, like tiny eyes, the seed is ready for sowing.

So small is tobacco seed that it is mixed with corn meal or coal ash to make the sowing easier. A spoonful of seed will produce a field of tobacco, and no machine can sow it so well as the farmer's hand. If the seed is sown too thin, the plants will be short and squat; if too thick, they will be weak and spindly, like calves or colts freshly dropped.

The farmer mothers the growing seed in the beds. He waters it, sometimes two and three times a day, and raises the glass sash again and again to air it. The seedlings swell and boost their way to the light, sending out leaf and stem, anchoring themselves firmly with their roots. They load up with sun and the salts of the earth, begin overrunning the beds; now the time has come to remove the glass entirely so that the young plants may be hardened for their fight to live in the open field.

When the plants are about six inches long, they are ready

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for transplanting. The seed beds are soaked until the plants loosen their grip on the soil. The farmer and his helpers carefully pull them and carry them in baskets to the transplanter in the field.

A water-barrel is built lengthwise on the transplanter, and over this perches a seat for the driver. Behind the barrel, low, almost skimming the ground, are seats for two other workers, often women or girls, who drop the plants. The transplanter drills a furrow for the plants, runs water into the furrow, and with its shovels sweeps the soil around the plants, setting them firmly in their row.

After the transplanting, the farmer faces his hardest stretch of work. Often he must restock the plants which have failed to survive the shock of transplanting or fell early victims to the cutworms and wireworms. Then he starts running the horse-cultivator between the rows to break the ground and rip out weeds. He follows the cultivator with the hoe. Day after day, hoe and horse alternate, and in time the field becomes clean and smooth and clothed with green. Dark, tropical, majestic, with full drooping skirts, the broadleaf plants shoot a spike and sport a blossom in their crown.

Now the farmer must trim his plants to get more body into the main leaves and make them ready for the onslaughts of weather. He pinches off the buds, breaks off with a sidewise twist of the hand three or four of the upper leaves, hooks off shoots and suckers.

The Connecticut Valley is the milling grounds of storms. Rising like a ballcock, the sun draws water and steams the countryside with humid heat. Rain clanks across the to-

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bacco fields with its hoarse exhaust of wind. Hail streaks down, piercing and stripping leaves.

Defending his plants against weather and pests, the farmer carries them through to maturity. The dog days of August are here, and he and his helpers go into the field with hatchets shaped like tomahawks. They chop the plants down and drop them on the ground to wilt. Then they spear them on laths, load them on a wagon, and haul them to the curing barn.

The sides of the barn are made of pine boards, with each third board on hinges so that it may be opened for ventilation. The gables of the barn are also supplied with ventilators to allow air to flow lengthwise through it. Great swinging doors are on both ends of the barn. Inside, the barn is divided by supporting posts into "bents" or sections. Four tiers of poles rise up to the roof, and on these the laths of tobacco are hung, evenly spaced.

The hanging plants dry, turn yellow, turn brown; the curing starting along the edges of the leaves and flickering toward the midrib and butt. When the curing is complete (an acre of tobacco loses five tons of water) and the fall damps come along, the plants are taken down and piled to keep them pliable and soft. The leaves are stripped from the stalks, put into a box press and pressed into bundles.

The farmer's work isn't done yet. In a corner of the curing barn is a little room provided with a pot-bellied stove and a workbench with "drops" or pigeon-holes. This is the sorting room, and when the stove is going strong, the place is a sweat-room thick with the sweetish odor of damp tobacco.

The farmer and his helpers sit at the workbench and

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from the bundles draw the honey-brown leaves, smooth them out with deft strokes, separate the various grades, dropping them into the appropriate holes. The better leaves go into cigar wrappers and binders, the rest into pipe and chew tobacco. The sorted leaves are tied into twists of from twelve to fourteen leaves, and then are put into cases for the buyer.

The tobacco buyer has already been scouting the farmer's crop. With a rubber apron around his middle, he has barged through the fields. He has nosed about during curing time and has tested the leaf in the bundle, fingering it, watching it burn. He makes his last offer, it is taken, and the tobacco is hauled away in his truck.

A squall whistles across the valley of the Connecticut River. Great wads of clouds like guncotton blow across the sky. The farmer closes the sorting room where he has worked all winter. He walks across his fields. He feels the earth thawing beneath his feet. He hears the peepers in the marshes. He begins to plan his next crop of broadleaf.

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CHAPTER I

THE ROUSING CALL OF THE COCKS GREETED MOE MILLER as he left the farm with his load and headed south in the darkness toward Hartford, guiding his ten-wheel truck over the back roads he knew better than the lines in his big hands.

There was a bite of frost in the air, but Moe was dressed lightly in a jumper and bulky overalls, which made him look even bigger than he was. An engineman's cap was yanked down over his hooked nose, and his cud of tobacco strained like a fist in his cheek. Chewing saved time and trouble; his broadleaf had often liquored and fed him the whole day through.

The distant lights of the city glowed against the night sky. Mist clung like white cloth in the hollows. Tobacco barns loomed up in the fields and slipped away, and the peepers whistled without let-up in the creeks and brooks and marshes.

Day had not cracked when Moe reached East Hartford, crossed the bridge and the railroad tracks, and turned into the narrow streets of the river front. Here in the skidrow stood the furniture factory which had been converted into a workers' hotel by George Kahn, a brother of Max Kahn, the plantation owner who was a neighbor and close friend of the Millers. The hotel included a beer joint and a lunch-room, for which Moe was to unload one hundred bags of culls and pig potatoes.

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Moe backed into the alley, heaved off the truck, and entered the building. He passed through the beer parlor, which had a free-lunch counter, and found George Kahn talking to his cook and his dishwasher in the kitchen.

George was a tall, square-faced, pockmarked man of about fifty with hair that stood up in tufts around his ears. He ran the hotel single-handed, was his own bouncer, and there wasn't one of his thousands of drifting patrons whose name he ever forgot. He often supplied the tobacco plantations with workers. Though there had been a great clamor by civic organizations that the place be padlocked after a half-crazed Swede had tried to fumigate his mattress by setting fire to it, burning several of his mates to death in the upper loft, George, in cahoots with the police, continued to do business. He was a Russian-born Jew who had bought a farm with his brother Max on his arrival in this country. After a quarrel, he had come to Hartford but Max had remained on the farm and had become one of the top tobacco planters in the Connecticut Valley.

When Moe walked into the kitchen, George turned quickly. The expression on his heavy, gnawed-looking face changed as he recognized Moe. "Oh, Miller. Got the potatoes?"

Moe nodded, cocking his thumbs into the belt around his overalls and glancing with a sniff around the greasy, smoke-blackened kitchen.

"I'll send Joe here to give you a hand."

"I ain't takin one pig potato off the truck till I get paid for the load."

George fastened his small black eyes on Moe. They looked like oil-holes. "What's the big idea?"

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"I ain't takin no load off without being paid first."

"Do I look like the cap is burnin my head sudden?"

"I don't dump nathin and then have you start jewin me down."

"Say, your father is my old lantsman, a fellow countryman. He done business with me when you couldn't wipe your nose yet and he peddled around the country in a buggy."

"The old man ain't got nathin to do with this. This is the last stuff he's raisin. I'm boss now."

George gave a loud derisive whistle. "So you're boss? I didn't hear no extra in the streets about it."

The shadow of a grin passed over Moe's swarthy face.

George's voice became soft and fatherly. Like his brother Max, he could be a quick-change artist when it came to using his mouthpiece. "You'll be up the creek doin business this way, mister."

"That'll be my hard luck," said Moe.

The cook and the dishwasher looked questioningly at George, but he brushed past them angrily, his coarse, pitted face flushing red with anger and impatience. He walked through the beer parlor to the monkey cage up front, unlocked a drawer, and counted out the money.

"Ain't you goin down to see I ain't gyppin you?" asked Moe.

"It'll take more than a lummoX farmer to gyp me!" snapped George. "I'll be down."

Grinning broadly, Moe counted the bills twice, put them away, and lumbered out to the truck. A bag of potatoes in each arm, he climbed down to the cellar, faintly lit by a dust-coated bulb hanging over a row of tubs. He

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made his way over the slippery floor, between tubs of refuse, to the bin, and returned to the truck in the alley.

The long alley was dark. There wasn't a stir in it. From the railroad yards came the sharp hiss of a locomotive. The strip of sky began to show a thread of gray, and as the shadows lifted, a light went on in one of the upper windows of the old factory. Feet shuffled down the wooden stairs. There was the subdued sound of hawking and coughing. A drunk cursed in his sleep.

The air was raw. The wind had veered to the east. Moe was afraid rain would break up his work for the day. It was time for tobacco seeding, and he had to depend on his own two hands to do all the work on the farm. He slipped off his jumper, tightened his belt and, hugging a hundred-pound bag with each arm, hurried into the cellar. As he dumped the potatoes, he couldn't help chuckling to himself. His father should have been by to see how he had handled this George.

Moe worked steadily. For a man of his massive build, he was very fast. He had about a dozen bags left when he heard steps behind him. Thinking it was George Kahn coming down to see that nothing was being put over on him, Moe remembered the numerous times this old lantsman had cheated his father. He snorted contemptuously.

A dark figure leaped from the wall upon him. Another flew at him from the opposite direction. He stumbled, still holding the potatoes. A bag was flung against his face. A blow in the back sent him sprawling. Rolling over, he cracked his head against the cement.

Moe lay stunned for a moment. The bag was being wound tightly around his neck, strangling him. With a mighty

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effort, he sat up and struck back furiously. As he hit out with his fist, he felt a sharp pain go through it. He drew back, grunted, and raised himself on one knee. Straining, he pulled the other arm loose and tore the bag off his head, hurling his attackers loose. They scooted down the alley in the gray light.

A window above him was flung open. A shower of bottles rained down, missing his assailants by a few feet. A slop pail with its contents came down after them also. It splashed against the wall and caught him with its spray.

The crash of bottles brought out George Kahn. A cop hurried into the alley. They questioned Moe, and with grave faces hurried into the flophouse.

Moe spread his feet, breathing hoarsely. There was a deep knife-gash in his right hand. He wound a bandanna around it, but it worked loose as he handled the potatoes. He stuffed it into his pocket and finished unloading, staining the bags.

The cop came down without finding any clues. George Kahn said, "Somebody knew you had the money on you. If you wasn't such a smart feller, they wouldn't bother you. Now does it pay to be so smart?"

Moe loosened his belt and put on his jumper. "It pays when you do business with crooks."

"What in hell do you mean?"

"I talk plain English."

"Don't make yourself out to be such a tartar," said George coolly. "A regular tartar you are becomin, a little too tough for your own good. Your father was never a tartar. Learn from him. He'll live until a hundred and twenty." Raising one of his long, powerful arms, George

touched the puzzled policeman, and both of them went up the alley.

Moe swung himself up on the seat of his truck. He put his hand to the ignition key and winced. He pulled out his bandanna and wound it again around his knifed hand.

A bottle crashed against the truck. He jumped out and faced the factory. The windows were empty and dark, except the one in the roof loft. A shadow bobbed at the window, and a skinny little man hung over the sill. In the growing light Moe could just make out the peaked face with its scraggly mustache.

"Moey, Moey, don't you remember me? It's Bartasus, your old *kum*, Anton Bartasus, who worked for your father so many years. It's honest Anton." He crossed his lips with a finger. "Come closer to the window," he whispered in Polish. "I am afraid of the police. The plantations are beginning to send trucks out. They are rounding us up like goats."

Moe put his foot on the running board of the truck. "Got no time, Tony."

"Ach, Moey, Moey, it was I threw the beer bottles at those rascals. Also the human water to wet the wings of those bums."

Moe walked up to the wall impatiently.

"My friend," said Bartasus, "they have taken off my trousers. I am as naked as a bird, my falcon. Come up. You will see."

"Listen, Tony; I got to get back to work."

"Moey, will you leave an old friend alone this way?" There was terror in Bartasus' screech.

Quickly Moe ascended the wooden stairs to the loft of

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the factory. On one side was the shaftway, and the charred floor had holes where the machines had been ripped out. It was crowded with cots. Some of the men were sleeping, others were sitting up smoking and talking. The air was webbed with smoke, and there was a smell of feet and bad stomachs.

Perched on his cot in his underwear, little Anton gave Moe a sickly smile. His face was white, his bloodless ears stuck out. His hand shook. "My shoes gone. My pants gone. The dirty frogs, the rascals, and I owe that George for lodging. He will not leave an inch of skin on me."

"How much do you want?" said Moe.

"I think five dollars."

Moe took out the wad of bills, eyed with a hostile stare the men who pricked up to watch him, gave the little Pole the money, and stalked out.

"I will come some day to work it off, brother."

Moe was down the steps when Anton yelled after him: "Greetings to your mother, that wonderful woman. Greetings to the Old Testament, your father."

Moe got into the truck and drove out of the alley. As he wheeled into the street he saw George Kahn, his hair standing up like the horns of an owl, talking to a pair of bums at the door.

Moe put his hand to his pocket. Grimly he gave his ten-wheeler the gas.

CHAPTER II

MOE'S HAND SWELLED UP LIKE A BOXING GLOVE. EVERY time he gripped the steering sticks of his tractor, the sweat broke out on his face. He squinted painfully at the darkening sky and left the plowing field.

As the tractor clanked past the farmhouse, his mother's voice shrilled inside. "Three o'clock in the morning he runs off in his truck. He comes back and won't have breakfast. It's two hours late for dinner. I tell you, Mary, don't marry a farmer."

"I ain't that hard up for a man, Mrs. Miller."

Moe stopped under the dooryard poplars. As he climbed down to refuel the tractor, he caught a glimpse of a red-haired girl staring at him through the window with a smile.

Mrs. Miller came out on the porch, her slim arms bared to the elbows. She was louder and sharper than she dared to be when the Millers were alone. "Can't you wait until you've eaten? Are you married to that tractor? And, please, we have no water."

What got Moe's goat was that, though he had bought the pump a year ago, neither his father nor his mother, who were quick and smart enough at other things, had learned to start it. They broke their heads over the simplest piece of machinery; he had to be tending the pump all hours of the day like a nurse-girl. At times he felt he had been a fool to spend so much of his time and money installing a water system for them.

He got the engine pumping and went up the stairs, binding his bandanna around his hand. If his parents saw the

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cut, he'd never hear the end of it. His weight shook the porch. He took another look at the sky. A cough made him turn awkwardly.

On the other side of the door stood the red-haired girl. "Hullo," she said with a smile. "I don't think you remember me." When he failed to reply, she tossed her head. "Can I get through, please?"

The door caught him across the shins. Loaded down with rugs, she staggered toward the clothesline. The big farm boy stared at her from under his burned, heavy eyelids. A gust of wind bellied her dress. Swinging the stick from her shoulder like a bat, with a lusty cry at each stroke, she beat the rugs.

Moe slouched into the pantry and washed at the sink. His mother left the white bricks of Sabbath bread, which she was getting ready for the pans, and spread a fresh tablecloth for him. As she served the soup full of hot golden pads of fat, she told him to be careful not to spot the cloth.

Here were all the signs of Friday, her special field day. Other women wore old clothes for housecleaning, but she dressed for it. With silver rings in her small ears and a rhinestone comb in her coiled black hair, she had polished furniture and floor, with the help of this new girl, so that everything shone like glass. The floor was waxed as if for a dance, and on the bureau, which took up one side of the long farm kitchen, stood the silver sticks with the milk-white candles—to be lit, in fair weather, when three stars appear; in cloudy weather, when hens go to roost.

Mr. Miller shuffled into the kitchen with a book. He was dressed for Friday, wearing trousers that his wife had

pressed, a white shirt open at the collar, and black bluchers. A well-built man, he had given his son his broad shoulders. With his gray unruly mustache, he looked like a kindly Cossack. Only his inflamed teary eye, his vague dreamy look, and his stoop showed that he was not the vigorous, alert man he had once been.

"Israel!" cried Mrs. Miller. How she loved to boss the old man.

He raised his eyes from his book. "Woman, the law says a Jew should not interrupt his reading even if a great man salutes him, even if a snake coils around him, but if a scorpion, a little she-scorpion——"

"Israel, please!"

He never tired of courting his handsome wife, teasing her, treating her tenderly like an overgrown girl. "Woman, I know what you're going to ask me. I haven't made a spot enough to water a fly in the bathroom."

"Do be serious for once. The doctor has ordered you not to read so much. Can't you rest a few minutes?"

"I've rested plenty. If the doctor told me to stop loving my wife, would you expect me to obey? . . . Well, son, how are you doing in that upper field?" Then, catching sight of the hand, he asked, "Have you hurt yourself?"

"It's nathin," grunted Moe, dipping up his soup.

The old man settled himself in a chair. "When you went down with the potatoes, did you try to pick up a man or two?"

Moe shook his head.

"Help will be hard to get later. This is a war. Now is the time to hire. You have no one to help you."

Mrs. Miller broke in. "You were busy reading, as usual,

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and so you didn't have eyes. The father a book, the son a tractor. I ran out to call your son for breakfast again and again. I rang the wheel, I shouted from the hill, but, no! He takes a fist of that tobacco like a peasant, and that's provisions for him for the day."

The door opened, bringing in the smell of the damp wind. The red-headed girl lugged her rugs past the table. Her hair was wild, and there was a smudge on her snub nose.

"I forgot to tell you, Moey; this is Mary Foley, Anna's sister." Mrs. Miller reddened prettily in her confusion. "Now Anna is sick, Mary is helping with the cleaning."

Barely taking the trouble to look at the girl, who ducked her head with a broad smile and whisked away upstairs, Moe threw a harsh glance at his mother. The whole country knew that Anna, the other girl, running true to Foley form, had dropped a kid whose father could be any one of a score of men in the village. His mother had to pretend she had heard nothing. Sometimes Moe wondered how she overcame her dainty feelings to climb into bed with the old man.

Mrs. Miller put the pans into the stove and straightened out, letting her gaze rest on the boy. She had the same morose black eyes as Moe; otherwise, there was no resemblance between the two. Moe was swarthy, with great shoulders and a thick heavy body, while she was slender, light-footed, her hands girlish and plump, so that, excellent housewife though she was, things were constantly dropping from them.

She said, as Moe left the table: "It's Friday. You might stop work earlier."

Miller raised his eyes from his book with a warning look. She knew that the boy had enough pressure on him these days, but she was always forgetting that there was only one way to handle that heavy stone of a son of theirs. He was about to chide her when in the upper story, directly above them, the furniture moved, and then clearly, huskily the red-haired girl started singing. The old man, to whom few things were dearer than a song, hastened with a rapt smile to the foot of the staircase.

Moe jerked down the peak of his cap and walked out. In the stable he doctored his hand with wool fat, climbed into the tractor, and went back to the field, where he picked up his plow. Setting his levers, pulling at his trip rope, he broke a new furrow, the tractor snorting and clanking and muttering through its exhaust.

It started to rain. Had the tractor been the old Farmall, he would have skidded all over the farm, but this twenty-two caterpillar, pulling three big, clawing plows, held the ground.

Moe finished the muddy field, raised the plowshares, and started over the puddles. He cut in between the out-buildings. On the porch of the farmhouse his mother and the girl were waiting.

Mrs. Miller flung her apron over her head and ran into the shed. She watched him steer the tractor out of the rain. "You are soaked, Moey."

He got down, screwing up his face. The fat was working on the hand, and it was throbbing painfully.

"Moey, I want you to take Mary home."

"I got work."

"Would it cost so much time?" she asked softly.

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He drew in his breath. "That ain't it. I got plenty of work without cartin no girls around."

"The girl will hear you," She smoothed down the apron around her neat waist. "I've given her bread and cake and milk for Anna's baby. The baby is a sick one. It needs fresh milk."

He turned away from her in annoyance.

"Your father would take her, but he can't drive. Now, when he is doing nothing, his driving would be handy. Look, while we are talking, you could have been there and back. She'll wait while you change into dry clothes."

"Talk about changin! Maybe you want me to date her up and take her out?"

He got into the truck and stopped in front of the porch. The girl had her arms full of parcels. The old man came out gallantly to help her.

Miller said, "Mary, you don't have to be afraid to ride with our son. He is a stubborn monk, with the rope around his middle. Girls are pig to him."

Mary burst out laughing at the solemn way in which the old man spoke. She glanced up over her parcels at the flushing boy. "Oh, I can take care of myself."

Moe ripped at the gears. She bounced in beside him, waving her thanks to his parents. As they shot into the road, she cried, "They're peaches." She smiled to herself, and added reverently, "Jesus, a man is lucky to have such a pair at home."

Moe kept his eyes severely ahead. The rain was coming in through the side of the cab. Mary edged up to him, and a faint fragrance, coming from her body, mingled with the homey, hot smell of the white bread in her lap.

Moe gave her a curt, quick look. On a strand of her hair drops gleamed like rhinestones. Catching his glance, she smiled, and her broad hands flew instinctively to her wild red hair. Two of a kind, he said to himself, thinking of her sister, and pressed down on the gas pedal. A bump in the road knocked them together.

Mary put her hand on his shoulder and pushed herself back. There was an amused look in her wide gray eyes. "Hope I didn't hurt you," she said.

"Naw." He moved away from her. "You didn't cripple me."

She laughed. "That's good. I told your mother I could make it alone. I ain't a piece of candy I can't stand a little rain."

Her friendliness and warm open smile rubbed him the wrong way. He pulled his head in between his hulking shoulders and stared straight ahead.

Puzzled by his sour silence, she, too, clammed up. She looked out on the dark, rain-soaked fields and gave a sudden little shiver. "Yeh, this farming." The smile faded from her face, leaving it cold and tired and hard.

They were nearing the stretch of woods bordering the old Foley farm. A patch of smoke hung above the trees. Set on a bank, the house came into view, and then the barn in which Steve Foley had hanged himself. Now Moe remembered when he had last seen this girl—eight or nine years ago, bursting into the house to tell the Millers the horrible news, a homely red thing with a stiff pigtail, face swollen with weeping, and a ragged little dress flying above her knees.

Bringing the truck to a stop below the house, Moe heard

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the sickly wail of an infant. The girl took some of the parcels and got out. When he made no move to help her with the others, she slid them to herself and, murmuring her thanks, her frank gaze meeting his cold stare, she climbed the bank.

He was out of the place in a jiffy, roaring homeward in the rain. In the shed, he picked up the work on the pan for steaming his tobacco beds. All that he would need after finishing the pan would be the wheels for the rack to hold it.

He lit a lantern and hung it near the door. Candles shone through the farmhouse window. His mother's voice came faintly again and again, calling him for the ceremonious Friday evening meal.

Moe ignored her summons and pounded away on the pan. The hand was still bothering him. He had broken the same hand when he was a kid, driving his first tractor, and the old doctor, who was taking care of his father now, had not set it right, so that it had to be broken again and reset. During the months he had carried his right hand in a sling, Moe had learned to use his left hand almost as well.

He would finish the pan tonight. Tomorrow first thing he would drive over to the Kahn plantation to pick up the wheels for the steaming pan, that would kill the germs and bugs and worms in the seed-beds.

CHAPTER III

THE KAHN PLANTATION WAS A VILLAGE IN ITSELF. AROUND the gabled, three-story house were grouped the great red curing barns. Near the warehouse was a small tenement in which Max Kahn lodged his seasonal workers. There was a slaughterhouse and a dairy, and across the road, on his own land, a boxlike synagogue; behind this lay the cemetery, no bigger than a poultry run. Scattered on the edges of the plantation were several small farms that were rented to workers he had transplanted from the factory after his brother George had taken it over and turned it into a flop-house.

When Moe drove into the plantation, he saw that the stakes and wire were not yet ready for the shade tobacco. The only signs of life came from the kennels which Kahn's son, Hy, the hunter and gadabout, kept for his prize beagles. Moe found the wagonhouse locked.

A familiar neighing came from the main stables, and a horse's muzzle was pressed against one of the windows. It was the mare his father had sold Kahn, calling him. Moe went to see how the old girl was faring.

The deep stalls, holding over a score of mules and horses, stank; manure was piled up everywhere, good hay was trampled underfoot. The animals were as shaggy as if they had wintered in the fields. His mare looked no better than the others. She wore her collar, and when he stuck his hand under it, it was hot. Whoever had unharnessed her had left her collar on all night. Moe unbuckled the collar, threw it on a hook, and cleaned out her stall.

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There was a thump on the wagon run overhead. Down the hay chute flew Kahn's foreman, Dominick Payday, landing on his behind. A frightened mule squealed and kicked. Steadying himself on his bandy legs, the foreman cursed, "Whoa, you cholera!"

"Why in hell don't you keep your stables clean?" demanded Moe.

Dominick rolled his evil little eyes. "Sonofabitch, the barnman go off. Boss cut his pay. Anton Bartasus come, and Hy make one goddamn party. Now boss go give me hell Columbia." He staggered out of the stable, spitting and cursing.

Moe grained the mare and went to get the keys of the wagonhouse. In the summer kitchen of the big house, he ran into Max Kahn, laying down the law to Dominick Payday.

Dominick had got his last name because he had run off with the pay of a bunch of men on another plantation. Years back, he had worked for the Millers and had forged a check, using the old man's name. He was as strong as a mule and, having worked in the coal fields of Pennsylvania, like many of the other Poles and the Lithuanians in the valley, he was able to lure many of his countrymen to the plantation with stories of big pay and fine treatment. For this reason and because he would have him by the crotch, Max Kahn had paid his fine, had got his sentence suspended, and had made him his working foreman.

Dominick took his boss's "hell Columbia" with a feigned expression of stupid astonishment. His wife, a dumpy little woman, who with her crippled daughter helped in the big

house, her gray pigtail stuck out like a pumphandle, was setting the table with trembling hands.

Max Kahn stopped his shouting when he saw the farm-boy. The rage drained out of his face. He slapped his suspenders over his thick shoulders. "Do you hear what I said?" he yelled at Dominick.

Max was of stocky build. He had unusually short legs and a big head, entirely bald, polished like a stone. His eyes were reddish and sharp, and when he was in a rage they became terrifyingly small, almost lost in the folds and pits of his rugged face. He had a coarse quick tongue.

"Well, you piece of dung, can't you talk?" he cried.

The stumpy little Polish woman whispered brokenly, "Dominick, Dominick!"

Dominick cast a vicious look at his humble wife. He knuckled his narrow wolfish brow and showed the whites of his eyes. "Anton Bartasus come. Hy, he throw a party."

"Don't put everything on that good-for-nothing son of mine," shouted Max. "I'll take care of him." Swinging around on his heel, lowering his voice, he growled, "Ach, Moey, a man goes away for a day on business, and everything is a crazy house here."

Moe knew what Kahn was up against, but he had scant sympathy for him. "I come to get the buggy for the wheels. I look in the stable. Cripes, Max, if I knew you was gonna keep the mare that way, I'll be damned if I'd let the old man sell her."

"Toot, toot," hooted Kahn, screwing up his mouth in the cool and provoking way he could assume so quickly. "We'll take care of the horse, don't worry." Walking as if he were weighted down, he stepped into the parlor. "Rose, Rosie

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girl, are you up? Here's Moey. Come down and have breakfast with us."

Moe retreated to the door.

"Still afraid of the girls?" said Max. "I'm asking you to eat with her, not sleep." Vexation puckered up his leathery, unshaven face. He lashed at the foreman again: "Listen, you; we can make men like you every day, but it's hard making horses. I want the stables clean as gold this morning and that mare taken care of like a czarina."

In his undershirt, Max went into the yard and unlocked the wagonhouse. While Moe hitched the buggy to the truck, he stood scratching his chest, squinting across the road at the beadle opening the synagogue for services.

"I ought to fire that dumb Dom. He's as much of a foreman as my behind is. But who can I get in his place, Moey?"

Moe climbed into the truck. "George is got a whole factory full of men."

"Those bums! Now you, you need only a man or two, but see how much trouble you have getting help."

"I got two good men already."

Max riveted his eyes on him.

Moe's face broadened into one of his slow, rare grins. "Sure, I got two men."

Kahn still had a look of doubt. "Moey boy, don't be a fool. The offer I made before you took over from the old man is still good as gold. Once again I say come in with me. I'll make you boss of farm number one. I'll put that loafer of a son of mine in the office, and I'll be on the road buying tobacco." As the motor started, he bawled, "Say, where did you pick up those men?"

Moe removed his hands from the steering wheel, flung them up, and roared into the road.

He wasted no time getting the wheels off the buggy when he arrived home, putting them on the rack which held the steam-pan. He hammered a rod to the middle of each end of the rack to lift the pan, and with the help of ringbolts on the rack and hooks at the ends of the arms to keep the pan up while he wheeled it over his beds, Moe completed his one-man steamer.

Before he had gone for the buggy, he had filled the old boiler and started a fire in the coal box. Now he screwed on the pipes and led them to the pan.

There was a stir among the trees in the yard below. The old man was coming up to the steaming. He was wearing an old panama hat pulled down over his bad eye. His face was lined, and he was without his customary high spirits. He examined the steamer. "A good job. But where did you get the wheels?"

"Your buggy. I tried a coupla other wheels, but they didn't fit. It's your buggy, the one you used to peddle in and Max was keepin as an antique."

"Ah." The old man's lips folded bitterly. He sat down in the shade. "Did you see Max?"

"Yeh—his stable too. You shoulda seen it. They leave the collar on Nellie all night. The barnman walked out on Max because he chiseled on his pay again. That outfit ain't farmers, they're a bunch of drunks and cheap skates."

The old man said quietly and deliberately, "As Max's manager, you could tend to all that." When Moe scowled, he broke off. "All right, you have made up your mind, I see. Not another word from me. You are right about Max

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again. How often have I spoken to him about his treatment of man and beast? I've pointed to you as an example, saying how though he is head of our synagogue, you are, in three Commandments at least, those about the treatment of our animals, a better Jew."

"What has Jew got to do with it? You got stock, take care of it or get the hell out of business!"

"Right, my son. Right," chuckled the old man. He gazed at him with eyes full of concern and affection, studying him as he bent over his pan in the bulky overalls with the rope around the great middle, the cotton waste bulging from a cavernous rear pocket, sweat running down his out-flung nose. The old man's glance passed over the wheelless buggy, and he flinched.

He rose to go. "You made the steamer and you can do this work alone," he said with a last desperate effort to be of some use. "But wait until it comes to planting. Then you'll have your labor trouble. Ah, if we had kept the mare; with two horses, I would have been of some help."

At the last planting with which he had given a hand, his driving had been so bad that the tobacco rows had cow-tailed over the whole lot. True, his eye was raising hell then, but he had never been much of a teamster. Moe watched his stooped figure moving back to the house. He had a fondness for the old man, but as to the old man's failure as a farmer the big son was merciless in his judgment.

He kept up his steaming, the pan holding tight, until he had sterilized half his seed-beds. When he came in for dinner, he found his mother and father still at the table.

Mrs. Miller was sitting next to the old man, her arm on his shoulder. She moved away as the boy came in.

Mrs. Miller slept late Saturdays. She was wearing the housecoat Rose Kahn had brought her from the city. She said, first crack out of the box, "You might have told your father about the buggy."

Moe shrugged his shoulders. "The wheels was doin no work, and so I took them."

The old man frowned painfully. "Esther, please don't act like a child."

She tossed her small head. "I have the right to ask, Israel. I am his mother. Max called. Was it right that I had to hear from him, second hand?" When she was aroused, her breath became too much for her, and her finely cut nostrils swelled. "And who are those two men you told him about? I know nothing, like I am a stranger here. Shall I get a room ready for them?"

"No," Moe said sharply.

The old man flattened his hands on the table and studied them in his embarrassment. "Then you haven't got two men?" he asked in a low voice.

"Sure, I got two men," said Moe. "You don't have to worry about them. They don't get drunk, and I didn't pick them up on the street, neither."

"And who are these two good and true men?"

Moe jerked up his big grimy hands, the right one still bandaged.

"So, these are your men?"

"Yeh."

"And you can depend on them alone and grow tobacco? You can depend on them for bread and happiness; yes, cut

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yourself off from the rest of the world because you've got them?"

"Sure."

Aroused by the boy's cocksureness and his indifference to the concern of his father and mother, the old man lost his temper. "I suppose you'll go to them instead of a woman."

"Israel!" cried Mrs. Miller, horrified.

Moe brought up his sweaty, calloused hands and examined them with a satisfied grunt. "Better going to them than any woman in this country."

CHAPTER IV

MOE WASN'T FOOL ENOUGH TO BELIEVE HE COULD GROW HIS tobacco without help. He had raised 160 acres of potatoes one season almost singlehanded, but tobacco was a crop that demanded plenty of hand labor from the beginning. He had been planning to get an extra man all along. Having nothing but scorn for his parents' failure as farmers, he wanted no advice from them on how to get that help.

It was the caterpillar tractor which had weakened the last hold Moe's parents had on him. He had bought it against their wishes; his mother was appalled at the price, and his father pointed out that he already had the Farmall. With the "cat," Moe had plowed for his neighbors, farmed on the west side of the Connecticut River and up in Massachusetts, done 500 hours at an airport, and during the winter had worked on the town roads. He had cleared

more than \$2,000, and then had insisted that his father rent him the farm or he would go elsewhere and buy his own.

The old man had yielded. His years of make-believe were gone; he felt himself naked before his son. When his wife begged him to go to the city where he would not have to take this change so much to heart, he refused. He nourished the hope that Moe's difficulties in operating the home farm would make him see the light about Max Kahn's generous offer. The Kahn plantation pulsed with life, there was the synagogue, and the old man felt strongly his own and his wife's loneliness. He had put too much into the farm to feel happy about giving it up entirely, even to a hustling son; there was always the chance that he would recover sufficiently from his illness to join Moe in a partnership that would bring them closer together. Bitter as gall were the memories of those separations from an only child, when he had tried everything from opening a stationery store to starting a private school in the city. Moreover, the old man dreamed of seeing his big, difficult, grinding millstone of a boy settled and turning out bread for a family of his own. The old man remained on the farm, acutely conscious of his failure, hoping that life would yet give him the golden opportunity to right himself before his son.

The injury to his eye, brought on by the dust in the potato warehouse, and his heart attack after last winter's stormy meeting in the synagogue, forced the decision to turn the farm over to Moe quicker than he had planned. He could not forget Moe's deep disgust at his weakness in allowing Max Kahn to get the farmers to unload their potatoes because of a trumped-up surplus. Later, it had leaked out that Max had coined plenty by holding on to

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his. Without Moe's small but excellent tobacco crop, the Millers could not have met their production loans and their other debts. It was this which had also pushed Moe to strike out for himself, to concentrate on tobacco, using his tractor to get him out if hail, rot, the worm, or the buyers threw him.

All this passed through Moe's mind as he completed his steaming. Now he would have time to get himself a man. He would go to the village, and in Horton's shop, where the boys hung out nights, he would be able to pick up somebody steady.

When he barged into the house, his mother had a bath drawn for him and his blue serge suit brushed. While he was dressing, she bustled about, red spots flaming on her high cheekbones, a rhinestone comb in her coiled glossy black hair.

Mrs. Miller was getting ready for her usual Saturday night company, the Kahns. She set cut-glass dishes and tea glasses on the long table in the dining room. On the side-board she put the brass samovar, an heirloom. She fluffed up soft cushions for Max, who suffered from hemorrhoids.

The Kahn children, Rose and Hy, had spent a year with her after the death of their mother. She went over often to see that their household ran smoothly; it was she who had contrived that Dominick be made foreman because his wife and daughter would be thrown in with the bargain and be of help as housekeepers. She patched up quarrels between the plantation owner and his flighty son. During the high holy days or when life became too trying on the farm, she packed up a suitcase and visited her friends. Nothing would make her give up hope of bringing Moe and Rose together.

She was still flying around, a smile on her pointed pretty face, when Moe walked out into the yard, rolling a cigar from his own leaf.

His father was coming from the stable. "I've fed the horse and cow, Moey." He looked into the sullen eyes of his son and smiled self-consciously. His physical pain and enforced idleness had sharpened his tongue; the buggy had made him act like an old fool. Caught between his wife and son, as usual, it had been hard for him to restrain himself. This time, however, despite his wife's order that he keep the lad home on one pretext or another so that Rose Kahn could have him for an hour, he would know how to hold his tongue.

He would never grow tired of trying to fathom this burly, big-beaked boy, so unbending and cold. "Don't you feel better in this garb, better than looking like a monk with that rope around you?"

Moe dug a broad black nail into a match. As the flame spurted up, he said, "I always feel good."

"Stiff-necked Jew," said his father with a laugh, and then his eye caught sight of the west, red with the last fires of the day. Against the sky stood the dark pines. Cock pheasants called in the woods. The old man's face gleamed. "What a spring this is, Moey."

Moe's unwinking gaze followed his father's eyes. Dropping his swollen eyelids, he moved out of the yard with a heavy rolling gait.

The road took him over the bridge, spanning the brook which ran through the farm. Further up, on the left, was a thick wood with a bad reputation, called by the old timers Beelzebub Wood. Again from the pines came the

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sound of cock pheasants blowing like kids on whiskey bottles. This had once been part of a pheasant farm, before Hy Kahn's dogs had raided it; the ruined pheasant man had sold out to a Lithuanian named Martin Shabot, who hired out as a day-hand and made bootleg whiskey. A mile farther down, in a dip in the road, the cool air pooling from the river, sprawled the village of North Windsor.

On the main street of the village some of the richest growers in the valley had their homes—houses with pillars and piazzas and sloping grounds. Behind the houses were warehouses and curing barns. On the edge of the village stood a gas station and repair shop called "The Old Harry."

The usual crowd was bunched around Harry Horton, mechanic, justice of the peace, notary public, farmer, school-bus driver, now on his back under a truck. Most of the boys were Poles and Lithuanians, but the fat fellow to whom the truck belonged was Otto Pudims, a German and an open admirer of Hitler. With Otto was his slow-witted brother, sporting shoes yellow as calf droppings. Giving Harry a hand was the very boy Moe wanted—Patsy Baranowsky, who had worked for the Pudims, gotten into a scrap with them, and quit.

Moe went up to Patsy. "Workin yet?"

"Naw," said Patsy.

"Here's the fella we want," cried Joe "String" Petraitis. "We wanta fix the baseball field on the picnic grounds. How about lendin us the cat tractor, Moey?"

Moe faced him. "Three dollars an hour."

String was a good man. For a moment Moe had visions of having two hired hands. While he was out with the tractor, he could have one of the boys making the rounds

of the tobacco farmers with the steamer, and the other one taking care of the home farm. Moe said, "If you like my tractor so much, there's plenty of work for you on my farm."

"No, by Christ," cried String. "Thank the Jesus, my tobacco days is over. I'm gittin me a job in the aircraft."

Except loafers like Hy Kahn and a few steady farmers like the Pudims and himself, the boys were flocking from the farms into the defense factories.

Harry Horton stuck his long head out from under the truck. "Butch," he asked the older Pudims, "get me a cross-wrench." He took a long slug from a bottle on the floor and winked at Moe. "How are you, hawbuck? Ain't seen you in a month of blue Mondays. Stick around. I want you to look at a Hercules engine I can't time proper by guess or God."

A horn bawled hoarsely on the road, and a touring car flashed up to the pump, stopping with a piercing squeal. Its whitewall tires, foglights, chromium plating, silk flag and banner ("My Country. Love It Or Leave It") were lighted up for a moment; and then, as the headlights dimmed, the boys in a mass hurried to greet the Genghis, Hy Kahn.

The two Pudims and Moe remained inside the shop. There was a squawk up front; the Genghis had tried his decoy duck on one of the boys. He blew his silver dog whistle. Soon the pattering of paws could be heard, and his prize beagle, Beauty, leader of the raid on the pheasant farm, trotted out of the darkness. Hy took the beagle to every chase; boy and bitch were great hunters before the Lord.

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At the head of the admiring group, Hy swaggered into the shop, goose-stepping and jerking up his hand in salute. "Heil, Puddings!"

Otto threw him a sour look.

"Hi, Moo," said Hy, and Moe nodded curtly.

Hy squatted beside the truck. "What's cooking, Harold?"

Hy was built like his Uncle George—tall and powerful, walking on the balls of his feet, hips tight and narrow as a flask. He moved with a slight limp, having torn his kneecap playing football for the Connecticut Aggies, shortly before being expelled from the university. He wore a plaid jacket and gray suede shoes; his cronies considered him a fancy dresser. Hy led a varied life, being constable, fire marshal, star pitcher of the village nine, and president of the Iron Dukes, a social and athletic club to which most of the young people belonged. The chief distinction of this indolent, good-looking lad was his success with women. He boasted that no woman, no matter how old or misshapen, had ever had cause to regret his attentions. He had a tender smile for them, tracking the most elusive down, bringing joy, if only for a few minutes, to the farm wife whose life was dull, to the grass widow with a man in the army, to the little Polish girls who sewed cloth, strung laths, and sorted leaves on the plantations.

In his baggy trousers, with a ropelike belt and a stringy tie (almost everything he wore seemed to turn into string or rope), Moe watched Hy from his corner with open dislike.

Hy slapped his hand on Otto Pudims' stomach. "Never seen a baywindow on a backhouse yet."

Otto growled, "Now cut it."

Hy moved around with a catlike tread. "Butch, you ought to go back to Germany. That's the place for you. Look at all the *softig* dames you'd get being a stoorm trooper."

"Got as much right as you here," growled Otto, measuring him with a furious look.

"You go back, and Adolf'll give you all you want. Ach, them Cherman girls! They're good. If you won't take my word for it, you can ask Tony Bartasus. Can't he, Moo?"

Turning his back, Moe walked into the small room in the corner which served as an office, and picked up an auto manual.

"Tony worked in Germany. There's a song he rips off." To the wild delight of the boys, shaking his hips as if he were needle-threading down the line, Hy sang in his pleasant baritone:

In Hanover on die Liene
The girls have big Biene,
And the warts on their Gesichte
Is as big as their Titte.

Otto Pudims grew red in the face.

Hy cried, "Now look, man, I did you a favor as constable when your truck smashed into a car. But you get sore when I sing a little titty." He turned to the younger Pudims, dolled up in pegged trousers and a three-cornered hat. "Why you in the dumps, Fritz?"

Freddy Pudims stared at him with hate. In order to evade the draft, he had pulled all his teeth; and Hy, having learned about it, had told and the boy was to be called up again by his draft board.

"Fritz, you're on the fritz again, but as a law enforce-

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ment officer, belonging to the school of chasing *nack die Frauen*, I had to bring it up. Say, you got dependents?"

"You'll never git licked for holdin your breath," declared the older Pudims.

Hy jeered, "No, I'm using my breath to help you fellows out. Get hitched, Fritzzy."

The worried, dull-witted lad cried in a cracked voice, "Hell with the girls!"

"Boy, you getting to be as big a woman-hater as Moo Miller!"

Hearing his name called, Moe came out of the office with the manual. He leaned against the wall and followed Hy's horsing around. Although he was not ill-disposed toward the Pudims, who were hard workers and kept inside their own fences, he could barely keep from joining in the laughter at their expense.

"So you're off the women?" inquired Hy.

"Hell with them," said Freddy.

Hy eyed him sorrowfully. "Women ain't the only dependents."

"I got none."

"No father or mother?"

"You know damn well I ain't got them."

"Sweet little sister or brother?"

Fred showed his bare gums. "Naw, nobody exceptin Otto. They say he kin run the farm alone. He ain't no dependent."

"There's others, Fritzzy."

Aware of Kahn's great influence among the politicians, the lad looked at Hy queerly and hopefully, knocked his hat back, and scratched his head in bewilderment.

With a whoop, Hy grabbed the fist. "Hold it, hold it, you lucky stiff. There's your dependent!" He forced open the boy's fist. "Where's he gone to? Damn it, Fritz, couldn't you hold on to him? We got to bring him to the generals. Show them here's your dependent. It ain't the first time a louse has helped a fella."

Otto, the older of the Pudims brothers, went over to Hy and put his big red hand on his chest. "We took enough from you."

Hy returned his stare coolly. "So did Patsy Baranowsky. You fired him because he called der Fuehrer a sonofabitch bastard, didn't you?"

Otto pushed him back. "You betcha. I'll fire anybody works for me when I goddamn please."

Harry Horton scrambled from the truck to separate the two. The Pudims soon left, the older one scowling, the younger pale, his toothless gums sucking up the tears rolling down his cheeks.

Harry and the boys went out to examine Hy's new maroon car, while Moe remained inside to check the engine Harry Horton had spoken of.

"Going to have it christened tonight, boys," announced Hy.

"Who's the dame?" asked String.

"That's a military secret." Nevertheless, Hy lowered his voice to let the boys in on it.

"So you like them red?" yawped String.

Hy leaped into the car and drove off with the beagle. The boys drifted away. The last one to go was Baranowsky, who promised Moe he would show up for work Monday.

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Harry Horton grinned when they were alone. "The Genghis was in good form tonight."

Moe spat. "Otto shoulda knocked his block off."

"You sure hate that boy if you can side with the Pudims. It ain't according to Hoyle—but, brother, let's see that engine in the meantime."

It was late when Moe walked out of the shop, thumbs hooked into his belt. In the horseponds and tobacco pools the peepers were whistling to beat the band. He puffed with satisfaction on his sweet strong broadleaf, feeling that now, because he had a reliable man, he would be able to seed his tobacco without trouble, and for the next five or six weeks, until plants were ready for pulling, he would manage to get plenty of outside work with his tractor.

His parents were still up when he walked into the farmhouse. His father was washing the dishes, his mother drying.

Mrs. Miller's eyes were red. "You—we waited for you. We had to call up that drunken *goy* of a foreman to take Max and Rose home. He was drunk as Lot. Rose is going away on her trip, and she wanted to speak to you about the car."

"I looked it over coupla days ago—it was runnin all right."

"She wanted to say good-bye."

Moe shrugged his shoulders.

"Hymie passed about nine o'clock," said his father. "He said you would be home to spend the evening with us."

Moe frowned with distaste. "I said nathin of the kind."

"Our children, oh God in heaven, our children!" moaned Mrs. Miller. "One too much, the other not enough. You

knew they were coming, but you had to run off to *mallaka* with your Polacks and your *goyim*."

Moe planted his feet wide apart to answer her. He was wise to his mother's maneuvers. Catching his father's imploring look, he changed his mind and abruptly left the room.

"Hush," whispered the old man, stroking his wife's arm. "It's over. You can't put a cut piece back on the loaf again. Ah, sometimes you don't know your own worth."

Moe was on his cot unlacing his shoes when his mother, shaking off the old man, came into his bedroom. Realizing that she had pressed Moe too hard, she wanted to say something to put herself in a stronger position. "All I wanted to know was why you didn't come when you promised, and you got angry."

He remained silent.

"Didn't Hymie speak to you?"

He raised his eyes wearily.

"Didn't you see him?"

"Sure."

"Where did he run off?"

"It's none of my business," Moe muttered. Suddenly his lips twitched. "Yeh, I forgot. He did say somethin about going to a christening."

"What?" gasped his mother.

"A christening," said Moe, smiling.

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CHAPTER V

TO GET THINGS READY FOR HIS NEW MAN, MOE SEEDED ON Sunday. He had sprouted much of his seed with damp rotten apple wood. Mixing the sprouted and dry seed so that his plants would not all be ready for transplanting at the same time, he seeded by hand. Then he raked the beds carefully and covered them with glass sash.

Below in the yard the cow bawled. The mare neighed lustily, smelling grass. A blackbird clucked like a teamster. In the village, church bells clanged and hammered and clanged.

Moe leaned on his rake, surveying his work. A twig snapped in the field behind him. The red-haired girl was running toward him. She had come out on the wagon track which led through his woods to the Foley farm. She stopped to ask breathlessly if his folks were at home. A small cross rose and fell on her breast. She nodded her thanks and ran on.

When he came in for his meal, he was surprised to see her eating with his parents.

The old man twisted his mustache like a cavalier. "See, people—we owe it to our pretty guest that our son has come once on time for dinner."

Her mouth smiled faintly.

Mrs. Miller shot a glance at Moe. She hastened to reassure the girl. "We called the doctor. He'll be here soon. He's a better baby doctor than Blumenthal." Sweat stood on her fine upper lip.

Three years ago, when she had just turned forty, Mrs.

BEN FIELD

Miller had become pregnant. She lost weight, was depressed, hysterical. She was horrified at giving birth at her age. She had been haunted by thoughts of her confinement with Moe, an enormous baby, and there hadn't been another soul on the farm when her time came for the second deliverance. It was a girl, lived a few hours. Seeing how the old man and even Moe took the death of the child, she bitterly regretted that she had allowed herself to go to pieces. She blamed Dr. Blumenthal for not strengthening her sufficiently. Hearing that he was keeping a Polish mistress, she slammed the door in his face. The old man missed the company of this cultured son of immigrants, who had paid his way through medical school with a milk route, carrying a book with him to the stable and on the route. Miller yielded to his wife. The old sawbones who had made such a mess of Moe's hand became their doctor.

"Blumenthal isn't the only doctor in the world," Mrs. Miller repeated vehemently.

The Foley girl said frankly, "I had a heavy date. I didn't get in until morning. Anna was up all night with the baby." She caught Moe's knowing stare. Swiftly, as though the blood were ready on the surface, her face was whipped a bright red. But she met his stare without blinking.

Moe reached for the bread on the other side of the table. She handed the plate to him. He took a slice without a word, his lips set stonily.

A car-horn squawked. The girl got up, and with Mrs. Miller hastened to the old doctor's car.

Moe brought his Ford truck into the yard for greasing. Assured of a good man, he must get ready to haul the tractor across the river to Windsor on a couple of jobs.

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His father sat on a bench under the poplars. He called this small grove his Genesareth hut. The trees were shaking down their blossoms, which turned greenish underfoot like goose drops. Perhaps it was the spring, the wonderfully mild day, that moved him, for he put his newspaper away, closed his eyes, and drawing a long, uneven breath, murmured a passage from the Bible which he was always quoting. Moe had heard it so often that he recognized it. "‘Ah, we have a little sister, and she has no breasts.’"

The doctor's car returned. Mrs. Miller got out.

She was delighted with the visit. Mrs. Foley had fallen on her neck, crying that she was as good as a sister to her—like one of those nuns—why, no one else could bake such sweet white bread in the whole country.

Miller asked impatiently, "But the baby?"

"The baby is worse. It was born a blue baby, with a bad heart." The sweat was caught in the fine down of her upper lip, and her girlish hands pulled at each other. She threw a rapid anxious glance at her husband, and lowered her head.

The suffering look passed from the old man's eyes. With profound tenderness, he reached for her hand.

She continued. "That Anna is no mother. Mary takes up the child as if she had raised a big family. Not only is this Mary a good housekeeper, so you can bless her hands, but it is a mother."

"A real *Panna Matka*," said the old man, giving a distracted smile.

"Yes, but that Anna is like Mrs. Foley. And that little boy with his twisted mouth, that Cooky who had the infantile paralysis! The poverty, the poverty!" she shud-

dered. "Israel, they need work. I thought maybe I could talk to Max. But we can find a little work for them here in the meanwhile."

Moe raised his head from the hood of his truck.

His mother flushed. "Moey, you do need help. Look at your hand."

"I don't want nathin to do with whoores!"

The old man screwed up his face wearily. "All right, all right. We heard you."

Moe clambered into his truck and drove off to the tobacco shed and the old man said with exasperated resignation, "Mama, let him do what he pleases. Don't worry so much about him. He is a man of twenty-six and no child any longer. Ah, in some things he is our own true son, but in others he acts like a skim-milk Yankee, like one of the first settlers here who stoned a woman if she showed her petticoat. What difference should it make who the Foleys are so long as they are good workers? Talk to him, and he understands these things the way one of your hens understands a prayer book. A hen knows the earth; there is nothing picks up a living better from it. But take a hen and have it look at a prayer book, at 'The Sons of Man,' what does it understand?" He held her hand tight. "How beautiful a day it is, Esther," he whispered, trying to drive the anxiety from her face, but she was in no mood for contemplating beauty. She always felt more at home indoors, and soon unhappily he followed her.

Moe was furious as he worked in the shed loading sashes for his tobacco beds. He'd be damned if he'd let his mother butt into his business. She had lost that right years ago when she had fled from the farm the first time. All her

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scooting around to the Foleys, her heaping of bread, milk, and eggs on their heads was just one of her ways of playing the grand lady. The old man was different, but he was soft as slop, especially as to women and children. As for himself, he was sternly determined not to allow either his father or his mother to ball up the works for him.

He buckled to, so as to prepare the job for his new man. He was up early for him next day. The Baranowsky boy, however, did not show up. While his dejected parents were having breakfast, he sped to the back road where the Lithuanian lived with his mother. All the old woman would say was that Patsy had left early for work.

Moe stopped in the village. Harry Horton was painting a boat in his shop. Harry hadn't seen anything of the boy. The Lithuanian Club had thrown a party for several boys who were being inducted into the army, and there had been heavy drinking; maybe Patsy was still cocked. Then, as an afterthought, Harry added that the plantations had started raiding each other for help. Why, right here at the crossroads one truck had stolen a whole gang waiting for American Sumatra, and there had been fighting.

Moe had a notion now as to who had picked Patsy up, but he kept silent, knowing that Harry would do nothing to throw mud on the Genghis.

Harry eyed his boat with satisfaction. "Young Harry and the Foley boy have been after me since shad started running, but yours truly has been busier than a skunk in a henhouse. Today I made the time. How about going fishing with us, farmer?"

Moe gave him a sour look.

"Well, sir," said Harry, "that's one reason I gave up

raising tobacco. You couldn't go fishing when the spirit moved you; you had to be worrying about labor, the weather, the bugs, the buyers. Son, a man didn't even have time to do his family duty."

Moe felt too pressed for kidding, but he couldn't help muttering, "You always had plenty time for that."

The long-faced, long-nosed Harry smiled mournfully. "Babe saw to that." His wife had borne him six children, five girls and a boy. In his crisp, glib, dry way, he added, "That was the reason I never had enough left in me for farming."

"Bull," said Moe severely. "You and Herman raised good broadleaf."

"But we couldn't keep our heads above water. Herman's all for the factory now. You couldn't get him back on the farm for love or money."

"I'd take him."

"With his rheumatism and bad feet? That old brewery horse!"

"I said I'd take him."

"You must be hard up if you're willing to take the lame, the halt, and the blind." Even when Harry kidded, he looked like he was pulling a long face.

Moe's respect and liking for the man had lessened somewhat of late. He believed that Harry had showed poor judgment and the white feather by giving up farming to become jack at a half dozen trades. This Yankee, who had married a German servant girl and had always boasted that he felt most at home among the scrubs and mongrels of the world, meaning the Poles, Lithuanians, and the Jews, had befriended Moe when the boy had been alone on the

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farm. There was a time when Moe had visited him regularly every week, his only recreation chewing the rag with Harry and Uncle Herman, drinking black coffee from a bowl, dunking Babe's thick butter cakes, and talking about "der grün lantsman," the name the old German gave to broadleaf.

As Moe got into the truck, Harry asked, "What are you going to do for help, son?"

"I'll manage," Moe said doggedly.

"You'd better scour the country and hire anything you can lay your hands on, or you'll be left in the lurch."

"I'll raise my crop if I got to do it alone."

Harry fixed his blue chips of eyes on him. "By God, I think you'd try it once you made up your mind." He slapped the brush on the boat and added gravely, "But before that, I'd see what I could find in the missions, the flops, the alleys. I'd even take my life into my hands and try the houses of ill repute on Windsor Street."

CHAPTER VI

LIKE A WHORE, MOE HAD WALKED THE STREETS SINCE DAWN looking for a man. His face lined with fatigue, he entered The Red Bottle and ordered coffee, hoping he would pick up a tramp or hobo he could depend on temporarily.

He had been in The Red Bottle before. One fall he had brought his father's help here Saturdays and Sundays, staying until four and five o'clock in the morning, dropping to sleep with his head on the table out of sheer exhaustion,

while the men tanked up and scraped their horns in the rooms on the upper floors.

Barflies filed in and out of the tavern. In the back a juke-box tinkled. A rouged waitress gave Moe the once-over. He leaned back in his chair and pulled out his tobacco bag wearily.

The swing door opened. A tall, rangy, bareheaded fellow, wearing a blue jersey and ragged sailor-pants, shuffled into the barroom. He ordered a beer in a cracked voice. When he dug into his pockets and came out with pennies, which he threw carelessly on the bar, Moe spoke to him.

The fellow pawed back his long, dusty blond hair. "Naw, I ain't lookin for a job," he muttered. He gulped down his beer, held on to the bar with bony hands, and belched painfully. "Beer don't mix with empty guts."

Moe ignored the hint. "My truck's waitin outside."

"Whoa, man!" The stranger squared about. The drink had flushed his splotched, wasted face. "What you growin, man?"

"Tobacco. Some hay, potatoes, but it's tobacco——"

"To hell with that tobacco!"

The bartender gave a broad smile as Moe rapped out, "I ain't askin nobody love me, love my job. I pay a day's wages."

Impressed by this frankness, the sailor sat down, helped himself to Moe's tobacco and rolled himself a cigarette. His stained knucky fingers trembled. "Hell, a man's got to eat somehow."

Moe blew him to a feed, and then they got into the truck. The man had nothing except the rags on his back.

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He fell asleep with a cigarette butt between his thin lips and snored, dead to the world.

Moe drove north, on the east side of the Connecticut. The fields were busy. In one place they were spreading tobacco stalks in heaps like pretzel sticks. In another, they were watering the beds and putting cloth on the wires for the shade tobacco. A steamer was going, its black smoke bushing out over the country. From all quarters came the clank and drum of tractors, and Moe, anxious to get back to his own, roared through the tobacco country.

Driving into the yard, he saw his father seated on the porch with a white sheet around his neck. A little man was dancing around him with a pair of shears. Mrs. Miller stood by, hands on her hips, superintending the haircut.

Miller called out, "Moe, here is our old friend, Anton Bartasus, the horseradish."

Anton hopped to the truck, his mouth cracked open in a joyous grin. "Moey, I come to pay my debt, the money you gave me at George Kahn's," he cried in Polish. He trotted back to the haircut. "I've cut off enough from your father's noodle to make a featherbed. Your mother will give it to you as a wedding gift."

Thrice welcome to Moe's parents, bringing back to them memories of the old days, Anton stayed for dinner. He sat next to the sailor and regaled the family with his adventures in such a way that even Moe had to grin behind his teeth.

Shortly after leaving the Miller farm, Anton had got a job in a mill, cleaning wool fouled with manure, accursed sheep! From there he transferred himself to a fertilizer factory, from which he was fired for drinking but, by Holy Mary, working with that smell would drive a saint to drink.

Then he found his bread as a janitor in a Polish church. In his youth there had been talk of making him a priest, so he was suited to this job; the Father, however, accused him of siphoning wine out of the barrels in the church basement. He really was discharged for getting into an argument which ended in his telling the priest there was a farmer, Reb Israel Miller, who had been a school teacher and knew the Old Testament better than did the Roman Pope. In truth, good people, there was no end to his jobs. Finally he decided to acquire a trade. He attended a barber school. Unfortunately, he snipped off an Irish *katzap's* ear during the first lesson.

Miller hadn't laughed so heartily in months. "Anton, you are as ugly as Aesop the Greek, but you can tell a story."

Mrs. Miller chimed in, "Yes, but you should have been careful. Remember what I told you when you left us?"

"Yes, mistress." Anton bowed respectfully. "And then the police pick me up. They send me to the woods to work in the W.P.A. . . . Life there is hard like in a Hitler camp. There is no wages. You work so many hours for shoes, so many for trousers. I get out. I must go back to the farm to see old friends. I must get a job. Better sweating for Moe Miller than chopping Hitler wood."

The little Pole with the watery eyes and drooping mustache, looking like an undersized carp that had been buried in mud all winter, didn't seem the worse for wear. Though he knew tobacco, he could not operate a tractor, and he could not stay sober for long.

Moe said, "I need a man who'll keep away from the booze, Tony."

The sailor, who had said nothing during the meal, snorted

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unpleasantly, got up with a loud yawn and went out, rolling a cigarette.

"Sure, sure, Moey. I'll be sober as a judge," cried Anton.

Moe looked doubtfully at him.

Anton leaped up, clapped his broken leather cap on his head, and declared, "Ik been ready."

Moe got the Farmall and took both men to one of the upper fields that had lain fallow for years. He was going to sow it with oats to get it ready for tobacco the next season. He ordered the sailor into the tractor and watched him closely.

"I run plenty of these toys," said the sailor, a cigarette dangling between his thin lips. "I won't hurt it."

Moe took a sudden dislike to the man. But he said quietly, "Ain't two machines the same, like there ain't two tobacco plants the same. Or two men."

He followed the tractor as it lumbered over the rough ground. It was on this hill that he had turned over in his first tractor, a Fordson, breaking his wrist. For days, suffering intensely, he had kept the accident hidden, fearing his mother would use it to club the old man into selling the farm and pulling out to the city.

Moe gave the gleeful Anton work around the beds, and then he drove over to a neighbor to do some wheel-harrowing with his caterpillar. Back at twilight, he found that the sailor had done well; there was no cut and cover. He took the Farmall to the shed.

On the bench in his Genesareth hut the old man was talking of old times with Anton. The sailor sat on the porch smoking, and as Moe came up he said, "I didn't finish the job."

"I didn't expect it."

"Yeh, but you brought the tractor down."

"Sure."

"You farmers take the cake. What the hell you scared of?"

Moe looked him up and down, and walked past him into the house.

The old man had overheard the exchange. Somewhat embarrassed, he remarked proudly, "That's a farmer for you, Grant. He will not let a piece of machinery, a nail or a screw, stay in the open over night, never."

"Hell, I been out nights, and it never done me no harm."

Miller laughed and then continued swapping reminiscences with Anton. "Who can forget Stevey Foley, a man who thought so much of his woman he took her name? Both of his daughters work for us, that is, one works now—the little red Mary. Do you remember how she came running to us that morning they found him hanging in the barn?"

"Smart fellow, that Stevey. I never understood why he did it."

"It is not so hard to understand," said the old man musingly. "Ach, and the next man I hired was Ivan Maccaloni, he who used to change his clothes before eating. He made a *bootka*, a chapel, in the shack where you are staying, called himself a *lodne tchelovek*, a fine gentleman. And then there was John Andrylat, to whom we gave a month's wages in advance, brought him to Hartford to see he bought himself a suit and shoes. He disappeared and came back a week later, barefooted, in old clothes, his own mother would not recognize him. He had sold everything for drink. Do you

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remember Adam Batulis who used to sing a song in three, yes, four languages, ending with, 'Go kiss my——'?"

"Sure," crowed Anton. "It runs this way:

Spoon: caf, lefel, lotzka.

Leg: regel, foos, notzka.

Dog: kalev, hoont, sobotzka.

Potzaloi minna ooshrotzka.

While the two men laughed like a couple of kids, the bored sailor went to bed.

The sailor was a good man; there wasn't a piece of machinery he couldn't handle; and although he was always stopping his work to roll a cigarette, coming into the field five or ten minutes late, and was snooty, Moe did not complain. If a man was a sourpuss and close-mouthed, he had his reasons for it, it was his own business. As a matter of fact, Moe would rather have tough guys to deal with because you knew where you stood with them.

What did get his goat was the way his parents treated the man, particularly his mother, who handled him with kid gloves. She asked how he slept, worried about his eating. Once when he sniffed at some herring on the table and said he didn't care for Jew-fish, she hurriedly took the plate away and apologized. This incident rankled Moe, but he held his peace.

Gradually, a change came over Grant. His sharp sallow face became fuller; he took more care of his appearance and grew sideburns. He started to talk. And on one of the days when the red-haired Foley girl did the cleaning, he spent the whole dinner hour popping off about the ships he had sailed in, the seas he had crossed, the ports he had painted

red. And when the women left the table, perhaps goaded by the disbelief on Moe's face, he drew a picture out of his pocket, saying he had taken this in a clipjoint in Hongkong. It was the snapshot of a naked little Chinese girl.

For once Mr. Miller lost his poise. He stammered with a deep flush, "Ah, one doesn't strip a man before his son."

Moe got up and went out on the porch.

Joining him, Grant asked, "What's wrong with the old man?"

Moe said coldly, "Why don't you ask him?"

"Ain't no harm in a picture." He took a broken comb out of his pocket and passed it through his hair. "Say, that old woman ain't a bad looker, neither."

Moe raised his heavy eyelids.

"You don't act like she's your mother," Grant said shrewdly. "By Christ, you don't look it."

Moe said contemptuously, "No, she ain't my mother. Never had no mother. A bird laid me on a roof, the sun hatched me."

Moe watched his mother closely that night. For the first time it struck him that she could be attractive to other men. Orthodox woman though she was, she wasn't averse to attracting their attention. She lorded it at the table with a spotless apron with a looping bow around her slim waist. She had changed her earrings and wore the drops Hy Kahn had given her. She sipped her tea, holding her glass with a small finger extended like a spine.

Mrs. Miller suddenly became aware of her son's stern, disapproving glance. "Is there something else, Moey?" When he rose without a word, she looked at him in be-

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wilderness. Noticing the sailor's bold eyes, she colored like a young girl.

Moe had a piece of cut-over land to break up in the village, but he decided, that night, that it could wait. Tomorrow he would bring his "cat" up to the ridge fields, clear out stone, and work around the farm for a while.

He drove the tractor, while the men loaded the stone on the stoneboat. When they hit a big rock, Moe got down to help with crowbar and chain. They dumped the stone in the fencerows.

At the other end of the field where the brook ran, splashing and yodeling could be heard. Cooky Foley, who had been coming over to watch the men work, leaped out and dashed across the field. His sister trailed after him, her arms full of yellow cowslips.

Mary waved her hand gaily. "Hope you don't mind our picking these flowers."

Moe said, "You can do all the weedin you want around here."

She was barefooted. A short dress hung to her wet knees. Her eyes sparkled. "I had an argument with the kid about tractors."

Cooky resembled his sister. He had a broad freckled face and a twisted little mouth which gave him a tough expression. A cowslip was stuck into his cutaway cap, which was covered with pins and buttons. One of these bore the picture of the President with the words, "Labor's Friend."

The lively kid leaped up on the tractor. "Caterpillars like yours is better than them cleat kind, ain't they, Moey?"

Mary smiled. "I worked near Willamantic for a lady who

owned a cleat tractor with one of them hydraulic lifts. It handled easier than a washing machine."

"They got rocks big as corncribs there," Moe muttered without looking at her. "Don't need cleats for these fields."

"Didn't I tell you?" yipped Cooky. "Here's a guy knows tractors, all right."

Moe turned his back on the girl and picked up the rock chain. "Let's get the lead out of our pants, men."

Grant's lips pulled back as he watched the girl turn and go again into the thicket bordering the brook. "I wouldn't mind layin that. Hey, kiddo, how about fixin me up?"

Cooky's rusty face grew white. He leaped off the tractor, his fists flailing. Grant caught him and flung him to the ground.

Moe walked over. "Keep your hands off the kid!"

"Aw, the little sonofabitch. I was just pokin a little fun."

Moe pushed the raging boy away. "You beat it."

"I don't need nobody to whip this bastard. Drunken bum, I find him alone, I'll kill him!" Sobbing, the boy stumbled across the field and disappeared among the bushes.

Anton shook his head gravely. "Don't start up fightin, brothers. It don't pay, this fightin about a girl. I know."

The red splotches faded from Grant's cheeks. Breathing hoarsely, he pushed his shirttails back into his pants. "Hell, the boss could use a little of that himself. Mister, it's good for what ails him."

Moe braced himself against the rage tearing through him. When he trusted himself to speak, his voice was low. "Just keep your hands to yourself on my time. That's all."

Grant snorted loudly.

The rest of the day the two worked grimly and silently

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side by side. At quitting time the hired men left the field together. Moe remained to finish alone.

Moe came down after supper time. Grant was on the porch shaving himself with Moe's razor. Anton sat on the bench regaling Miller with a story.

The old man said to Moe, "What happened? I hear the spring's got you, too. The girl——"

"To hell with her!"

Grant winked at the men. "I want some money, boss."

"Sure."

"I want to get to town tonight. I ain't no monk, like pop says you are."

Moe went into the house without a word.

Mrs. Miller, who had been listening tensely at the door, whispered, "Moe, what harm will it do if you take him to Hartford?"

"I ain't runnin no taxi."

He was at the desk when Grant walked in, shaved and combed, his sideburns like a chin strap. "You ain't payin me no paper," he declared, eyeing a check book at Moe's elbow. "I been rooked plenty of times with paper."

Moe paid him in bills. "If you think I'm cabbin you to some rumhole and wait half the night to pick you up, you got another guess comin."

"You can take your job——"

"Sure." Moe heaved up, cocking his thumbs into his belt. "I was gettin along before I saw you. You was gettin along before you saw me. We'll manage after you get the hell off this place."

"You scissorbills think a white man's got to take it layin down. You got plenty grub, women, everything, but if a

BEN FIELD

workin stiff wants to share a little, you're the bitch in the stable."

Eyes round with fright, Mrs. Miller pressed against the door and motioned frantically to Moe.

Grant walked out, pawing back his dusty blond hair. He raised his hand in a grand salute to the old man and Anton. Rolling himself a cigarette, with no more on his back than when he had come to this job, he sauntered down the road.

Moe returned to the house. His mother met him with a wild outcry. "Over a little thing you lose your temper!"

"I know what I'm doing."

"You can learn from your father. He got along with all his workers. Always he got along."

Moe sat down at the table and speared himself a slice of bread.

"What will happen now? How will you put in your crop?"

"Ma," he said with harsh finality, "I ain't no pup of his, I ain't no pup of no man!"

CHAPTER VII

MOE HAD TO DEPEND SOLELY ON ANTON.

Anton slept in a shack, which had been the *bootka*, the chapel, of the pious old hand who had worked for the Millers after World War I. In spite of all their urgings, the little Pole stubbornly refused to share Moe's room. Scrubbed thoroughly by Mrs. Miller, the shack stood in a field across the brook. Anton put decorations on the walls

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—the bombing of Warsaw by the Germans, Polish General Pilsudski with a bushy mustache, an engraving of a famous brewery with the words, "Our hand has not lost its skill."

The shack gave Anton freedom of movement. He came and went as he pleased. Moe raised no objections so long as he showed up at work. The Millers were glad to have him do some gadding about, because he seemed happy and returned with stories that livened the dull hours.

After a while, Bartasus' excursions became more frequent. To cover the thickness of his tongue and the unsteadiness of his legs, he had various explanations. Once, it was that Martin Shabot, on the pheasant farm, had forced him to eat a five-pound cock, and that had gone to his head. Another time he revealed that Max Kahn had picked him up in the village, had treated him to beer, and had asked him to work for him, but Anton had told him stoutly that so long as he had one ounce of brains in his skull he would hold his job at Moe Miller's.

Beer and gin bottles soon appeared in the most unlikely places on the farm. When the old man gently called his attention to them, Anton confessed that some hens drop their eggs in the strangest nests.

Moe was racing against time because he was shorthanded, running his tractor day and night, to be ready for transplanting his tobacco. Having some June grass and rye, he decided to mow before he plunged into his tobacco. The grass had ripened fast because of the early spring.

He sharpened his cutting bar, oiled his mowing machine, and hitched it to the Farmall. At the last moment his plans

were spiked when Anton, out all night, staggered into the yard.

"Ach," the Bartasus groaned, "it's Martin, that old dog. He gave me too much pheasant." He put his head under the pump and went reeling toward the brook. Too sick to make it, he crawled into the stable to sleep off the pheasant.

Miller looked at Moe with his kindly, shortsighted eyes. "Be easy with him. So the hay can wait a few hours. You have to work with him. He's been trying to behave. I know, and it wasn't easy for him in that camp. What other pleasures has he got? Life has beaten him up like a sour apple."

"If you get angry with him the way you did with that good man, the sailor, you won't have anything," Mrs. Miller began.

"Esther," pleaded the old man, "no school, no teaching now."

"I am still his mother, even if he won't listen. As I said before, there are the Foleys. Mary could help. What is riding behind a tractor?"

Hopefully the old man interrupted her. "I might be able to ride the machine for an hour."

"Israel, don't you dare!"

Moe left them to their chattering, but he hadn't gone a dozen steps before his father called him back to look at the water pump. He scowled. "You could give me more help by learnin how to run a little half-horse engine than throwin drunks and whoores at me!"

"One of these days I'll learn that, too," was the old man's soft answer.

Anton emerged from the stable for dinner with hay in his hair. He stumped out in unlaced shoes, several sizes too

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large for him; he had frozen his feet in the W.P.A. camp. He sat at the table sheepishly, fingering his thin yellow mustache. His hand shook. It was evident he was in no condition to work.

Moe's face darkened, but he held his tongue. He had given up all hope of mowing for the day, when he heard singing in the yard, the same song he had heard from Mary Foley when she came for the first time to help with the cleaning. He shot a look at his parents. They had pleased expressions on their faces. The old man had showed up late for dinner, in a sweat. He must have taken the cut through the woods to ask her to come over to give a hand with the hay.

Moe gulped down his dinner. If she wanted work, he would give it to her!

Mary was waiting for him at the machine when he strode out of the house. She was wearing a sort of baggy Dutchman's breeches with orange buttons that knocked your eye out. Her hair was bound with a piece of orange ribbon, around her forehead like a headbrass. She said pleasantly, "I see you're short of help. I got nothing else to do this afternoon." She vaulted lightly into the saddle of the mowing machine. "Cooky says you fired the sailor boy because he was naughty." A knowing smile played with her firm mouth.

Moe pretended he hadn't heard her, adjusted the spark, cranked the tractor, and roared into the grass. He was about to jump down to release the lever of the cutting bar, but Mary did it quickly, crying, "Oh, I was raised on one of these babies." Sitting back, folding her arms across her breast, she grinned at him. "Step on it, man."

Moe swung around hard, hitting the grass in the stony little piece adjoining the yard. The machine bounced. The girl clung to the saddle with both hands. She shouted, threw up an arm. The sudden stop almost catapulted her into the grass. Hanging on to the fence were the Millers, anxiously watching.

"Too much for you?" taunted Moe.

She was down on her knees, searching in the grass.

"Well?" he cried impatiently.

She held up a hen, kicking, its bloody feathers fluttering over her.

"Goddamn things," growled Moe, turning on his mother. "How many times I asked you to keep them blamed chickens cooped?" He took the hen, wrung her neck, and chucked her over the fence into the yard.

The girl caught her breath. "Why, you got no heart, you!"

"Anything gets in the way gets cut down, lady." For a moment, something boyish, boastful stirred in him. He almost swaggered to the tractor.

Squaring her shoulders, the girl leaped easily into the saddle again. With a surprised but morose grin, Moe plucked his cap over his nose and clambered into the tractor. He backed, turned jerkily, cutting the field like a crazy pattern, bouncing the girl mercilessly, but she held tight and kept her foot on the bar-lever.

Across the yard crept Bartasus. He approached the fence and tried to wedge himself back into the favor of the Millers. He said meekly, "There is good blood in that girl, mistress."

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Too frightened by Moe's wild but skillful driving, Mrs. Miller did not hear him.

He cleared his throat. "There is good Polish in that girl, Old Testament."

Miller understood the hangdog look on the little Pole's face. He smiled. "Yes, good Polish and good Irish and good American, friend Bartasus. As a child, she showed it. I came in one morning to see Stevey, and there is the little girl in the yard, her diaper frozen to the ice. Not a cry out of her. Look, look how she sticks to that seat, the way Rachel did to the household gods."

Moe cut at a furious clip, making up for lost time, forgetting in the heat of the work that the girl was behind him, clinging by the skin of her fingers to the iron saddle. The shadows were moving in from the fence when he chopped down the last wedge of grass and drove the tractor back to the shed. As he got out, he planted his feet wide apart and eyed her speculatively.

Mary had lost her smile and orange ribbon. Her hair was wild, and she was breathing heavily. She got off the mowing machine gingerly, tried to walk, and almost fell.

Moe put out his hand instinctively, but she slid away from him, slippery as the short June grass.

Mrs. Miller ran over to help her. The girl straightened up. The bones showed in her strong face. "I can take it," she said.

Mr. Miller said angrily, "Moe, are you crazy? You could have hurt her, driving the soul out that way."

Moe shrugged his shoulders. "You said she wanted a job," he answered without looking at the girl.

CHAPTER VIII

MARY CAME TO WORK REGULARLY IN THE SAME BAGGY TAN breeches she had worn on the mowing machine. She brought her lunch along the first day, but Mrs. Miller would hear of no excuses and had her eat with the family.

There was a full hour for dinner, and she began to help with the dishes. When there was not enough water, she started the engine, to the delight of the old man, who pronounced her a true American. With the folks and Anton, she sat in the parlor listening to the radio, and the day her sister Anna returned to do the housework, the place sounded like a poultry house at feeding time.

Moe limited his business with the girl to a curt order or a nod. He left the table first. As for the war news, he had nothing but scorn for old men, who could not spit without wetting their chins, trying to settle the affairs of the world.

He had begun pulling his plants, getting up at dawn so that many baskets, covered with soaked bags, were ready when his help arrived. He planted first in the fields with the heavy loam where the soil was cooler. The sandy fields would be planted in cloudy weather. Because of the heat, he chafed that he could not start planting before sunrise or late in the afternoon.

The planter carried a barrel of water and two seats underneath it, occupied by Mary and Anton. The pair dropped plants from their baskets into the furrow, into which water trickled before shovels closed it. Up on the tractor, Moe moved slowly and relentlessly back and forth, drawing the planter. The field behind him blossomed with

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the tender green tobacco plants. He put the pressure on before the sun took heart in the sky and wilted down the plants until they looked as shabby as dock leaves. Later, as it cooled somewhat, he put on speed again to favor the young plants, shocked by the transplanting.

Just as on the mowing machine, so here on the planter, Mary showed she was a real farm girl. She did almost as well as Anton, who could plant on either side and set on the click. Though the dust flowed up in suffocating clouds and gas fumes hit her in the face, she kept up with the nimble little Pole from sun to sun.

In the stifling heat, the old man showed up once, observed the planting and, overjoyed at the way things were turning out, praised the girl to the skies. "You are a lucky man, Moe."

The sour sardonic boy said, "Sure."

"But why don't you use the big tractor? The small one gets into the ground like an iron hen and kicks up a world of dust. Won't it be easier for Mary and Anton? There will not be so much dust and smoke."

"The Farmall is geared too high. She'll keep stallin'."

"But both people are fast."

Moe made a curt impatient gesture and walked away.

Much to everybody's surprise, next day the planter was hitched to the Farmall.

Anton said nothing. Since his last bout with the pheasant, he had been as disgruntled as if a serious injury had been done him.

Mary cried, "Using your big farm boy, I see."

Moe grunted.

"I mean that wheel tractor."

BEN FIELD

Moe stared at the tractor as if he were seeing it for the first time. "Yeh," he said dryly, "looks like it's got wheels."

"Funny!" She wrinkled her snub nose, got into the seat under the barrel and then, ignoring him completely, helped Anton, who settled himself grouchily beside her.

Moe waited for them, blinking bloodshot eyes. Yanking down the peak of his engineman's cap, he clambered up on the Farmall, dropped the marker, and rolled over the burning field.

During the heat, Mrs. Miller came out with cold water. At quitting time they found her in the shade of the poplars with iced tea and crisp sugar horns. She had brought along a couple of fluffy white Turkish towels. "You take a bath in the brook, Mary. Moe will drive you back. It's too hot to walk."

The girl shook the dust off the tan scarf she had worn around her head. "I got so many kinks in my back I'll straighten out best walking."

"It's just a short drive. Moe won't mind."

Mary wiped her wide firm mouth. With a cold glance at Moe, she said, "I don't need no favors. Thanks."

Mrs. Miller sighed. "It is hard work."

"Couple days ain't going to kill me."

The men went into the kitchen. The table was set. Mr. Miller was upstairs with a headache, and Moe said, "We don't wait."

To keep Anton from the pheasants, Miller had begun to allow him a drink a day, a cruet of prune brandy at supper. Anton dumped the brandy into his glass and swallowed it at one gulp. "Thunder," he gasped, his face flushing and his eyes filling with tears.

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Moe heaped his plate with potatoes and fell to. Glancing at Anton from under his eyelids, he asked, "What's the matter? You ain't eatin. Heat gettin you?"

"Cholera, no!" he cried in an insulted tone.

Moe smiled morosely. "The woman?"

The little Pole bared his broken teeth. "That red-haired one is a *fatum*. She sits next to you, you can't belch, can't scratch, can't do nothing like a man."

Moe kept a straight face.

"Maybe I am a ham, Moey, and soon will find as much work as a blind hen finds grain. But when I was strong as a falcon, I knew them. The women make life a *brindza*. In the old country, I traveled, I was a baker of fashionable cakes, had good clothes, and the girls were all ready to foolish with me, to take my last cent. When I left Poland and worked in Germany, the story was the same. I came to America, it was bad times, and all they showed me was their cold backs. Months passed, and I got myself a job in the mines. I wasn't in the boarding house one day when the landlady's daughter made up to me. They are all the same, all *podlotki*, young wild ducks, ready to lose their garlands for a cent."

Moe listened patiently. "Yeh, but this Mary ain't doin bad."

"Wait." Anton stuck out a stiff knotty finger. "Wait."

"She ain't doin bad, but soon as I get me another man I'll tell her she can go scoot." Moe was nettled by the way she had turned down the chance of a ride home, and uncomfortable because of her cold contempt.

"In the old country we lived like snuff-tobacco in a box. Only the wives of the rich were soft and appetizing—eh,

sausage is not for the dog. But two women I know were good in the world, your mother and Ludwicka."

Mrs. Miller had stepped in. He rose with a clomp of his shoes and took her hand with a bow. She reddened like a girl, looked at the empty cruet, and then her glance met Moe's. Anton must be getting feeble if a little brandy could muddle him.

She went upstairs to see after the old man, and Anton continued, "Only two women—your mother and the peasant girl Ludwicka. She it was taught me to read and egged me to become a priest." He stuck out his chest and chanted: "A poor peasant girl, Ludwicka, who did not possess anything but healthy hands for work and a heart which loved her fellow men, nevertheless in her poverty bestowed upon nearly half a thousand people treasures dearer than gold and jewels . . . When in her youth she became a servant in a manor, Ludwicka used to listen, from her own desire, to the way her master's daughter was taught to read and write. She quickly learned the printed signs and began to practice reading, and everyone, seeing her desire, helped her a little. In time she learned to read and write fluently. Understanding what a treasure she possessed, Ludwicka resolved to share it with her fellow men. She began then to bring together in the evenings not only girls but, farm boys, also, and with the greatest patience she taught them to read and write. When there were no more servants to teach, she turned to the farmers' children, and, besides the children, she was willing to teach adults and old people who wished, toward the end of their lives, to pray out of a book at last. She wrote down from memory the name of everyone who had learned to read. And now that she has closed her honest

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eyes, it is found that by her endeavors five hundred persons learned to read and write."

Overcome by the story, which Moe had heard him recite before, the little Pole dropped his head on the table and panted in a forlorn way.

Moe got up and went to the shed where he had work to do. He came out some time later, covered with sweat.

The last strokes of the sun were fading in the sky. A tree toad chirped. A flock of crows was lagging overhead, coming from the river.

Moe followed the path running alongside the brook. A figure leaped from the high grass between the shed and the bathhouse. It was Anton. Dancing in his excitement, he seized Moe by the hand and steered and pushed him into the rank growth on the bank above the brook. With a smirk, he stopped in the nettles and pointed. There, below in the brook, stood Mary. On the bank were her clothes, shed like the skin of a white snake.

At Anton's snigger, she turned. She looked up at both men. "Getting an eye full?" she asked with quiet contempt. She bent and picked up a towel and, turning her back, dried herself.

"Hey," cried Anton, "I told you. This one is for picking."

Moe flushed violently. With an oath, he hurled Anton into the nettles and fled.

CHAPTER IX

CARRYING HIS EMPTY BASKET, MOE PLODDERED DOWN THE last row of the last field, Anton in his oversized shoes clogging after. Mary lagged behind them, hollering to her kid-brother who was raising Cain in the brook.

Moe went into his room and sat down at his desk. He studied his time book, glanced at the calendar. It was Saturday, June 21.

For almost two weeks they had worked like hell in the sun finishing the planting, then resetting in the rain, shoving four fingers to the ham of the hand into the moist soil, dropping the plant into the holes as far as the leaf, and almost with the same motion pressing the earth down around it; and now, by God, they were through with that job on which so much of the life of the crop depended.

He let the breath go out of him. For a moment he rested, passing his big scarred hand across his sweaty unshaven face. Then he reached into the pigeon hole for the money.

Outside, in the Genesareth hut, his father was teasing Cooky, while the others watched with a smile. "Ach, you *koondas*, you imp." The old man's spirit was great these days in spite of his severe headaches. "Look," he said to his son who filled the doorway, "look, if you had married the way your pretty mother did, at the age of fifteen, you'd be a father of a *koondas* his age already."

Mrs. Miller blushed. "Israel!"

"*Chotosie*." The old man beat his chest. "I have sinned. I must not let the world know your age, mama."

Mary sat on the bench, her bloomer-like pants pulled up

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so that her strong bare legs were visible. Her eyebrows rose at the old man's crack, and she threw her head back. The laughter and the gleam with which she regarded the old man vanished as Moe approached. She said coldly, with a touch of sarcasm, "Well, boss, what's on your chest?"

Ever since she had caught him in the nettles with Anton, Moe had felt at a disadvantage with her. It burned him to think that she believed he had sneaked up to catch sight of her in the brook.

Moe was surly. "Ain't nathin more for the week."

She took the money, started to count, and, with a swift glance up at him, murmured her thanks.

"Your sister's pay is in this, too."

The tall Anna had done plant-pulling and would have helped with the replanting if the baby hadn't had another bad spell of sickness.

Mary's broad forehead wrinkled. "This is wrong. You're paying me for the full day, but today we quit at three o'clock."

"Ain't wrong," said Moe sourly. "Never made no mistakes yet payin out. Don't gyp myself."

Cooky broke in. "You got your pay, sis. Come on in the brook. The water's great."

Mary put the money into her blouse. She looked at Moe uncertainly, and then, as a smile flitted over her moist freckled face, she said, "I'll go down, Cooky, if you stand guard."

Anton coughed in embarrassment.

Moe gave him a hard stare and, shoving his pay into his hands, muttered, "Count your money, you!"

"Sonofabitch," cried Anton, "why should I count? There is nobody more honest than a Miller."

This gave Mrs. Miller her chance. It was torture for the proud, energetic woman to keep in the background. Fearing Moe's wrath, she hovered at the rim of what was happening on the farm, interfering now only indirectly by pushing the old man this way and that to "help" the boy out. The differences she had with Moe, the terribly disappointing realization that even if he were to become a successful farmer he would always look and act like a garage mechanic, this she kept deep within her own bosom or let it out occasionally in the family. Before others, she praised him to the skies, and, by putting it on thick, she added considerably to her own stature as a mother.

She laid aside her knitting to tell how Moe had picked up a pocketbook with \$60 on Beelzebub Road and how he had stubbornly refused to use a penny of it. Every time Moe heard the story, he recognized changes in it. The fellow who had lost it had been with a girl and so had feared to claim it, though Moe had put an ad in the papers. As a matter of fact, it was Mrs. Miller who had finally taken the money for household use.

As she began the story, Moe hurried away to the shed where he kept his old Dodge on blocks. Now that planting was over, he would have some weeks of less pressing work. With two good hands on the farm, perhaps Anna also helping, he could go elsewhere scouting for jobs. He had heard that bulldozer operators were needed on a development for defense workers below Hartford. The car, which should have new piston rings and an emergency brake part, would have to bring him to and from work.

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Moe got the car going and sped away, leaving his mother still the center of the circle. He had little trouble buying the rings, though the price had gone up. He combed the junkyards for the brake piece, a hook connecting the brake rod and the hand brake.

One junky said, "Bud, don't you know there's a war on?"

"So what?"

"So what?" repeated the junky, a pin-eyed runt of an Italian. "So parts is hard to get. So prices is going to be kicked higher than a kite."

"So I'll make my own," snorted Moe, wetting his cracked, blackened lips. He had done welding and other blacksmith work at Horton's shop, and he would make a substitute for the part which would work as well as the original.

Driving into the village, he was surprised to find no one at "The Old Harry" but the proprietor himself, squat in the office with his thin face hung over a letter. Harry grinned cordially. "How are you, stranger? Keeping your nose to the stone?"

"Kind of busy," Moe admitted awkwardly.

"Yeh, I'm getting bulletins from Mary." He held up a letter. "Hy left this. It's from Charley Shepherd, who used to catch for him. Charley is in camp in Louisiana. He writes the girls are terrific there. They go crazy over a uniform."

Moe observed, rolling his sleeves up over his thick arms, "Can't have no war without girls."

"And no peace neither," laughed Harry.

Harry helped him find a rod in a heap of scrap behind the shop. Then Moe made a fire of chips in the tuyere iron

of the forge, which was set off from the bench by a length of sheet iron. He shoveled in the coke, turned on a steady blast, and shoved the rod into the fire. Taking the glowing iron out, he dropped it on the anvil, hammered and drew it out, rounded it against the horn, and plunged it into water.

As he worked, a vein of sweat trickling down his swarthy face, he remembered his words with the wop. He thawed out sufficiently toward Harry to tell him about this run-in.

"So he's right," said Harry. "So we'll be up to our necks in this war before long, Moey. It'll be more than knittin for Britain. We're going to have a gas curfew, and that won't help me any. We'll have rationing of tires. Machinery'll be harder to get than a man under an old maid's bed. All right, I say, let's jump in with both feet and get it over with."

Moe shrugged his shoulders. "I'll go back to horses if there's no machinery. Manure is better than all the damn fertilizers they're sellin."

Harry chuckled. "Uncle Sam'll take a strong buck like you and ship him somewhere, maybe to Java or Sumatra."

"Give me a chance to study tobacco. Sumatra grows a good leaf."

"You got all the answers," groaned Harry. "Ah, toback, toback. Grandma Horton was close to a hundred when she died. She used to sing a verse to us kids:

Tobacco is an Indian weed
Which from the devil doth proceed.
It empties the pocket, burns the clothes,
Makes a chimney of a man's nose.

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Grandma knew tobacco. She rolled and peddled Long Nines in a buggy, like Israel, your father. Those days they grew a shoestring tobacco like the Maryland narrow leaf. She was a tough old Yankee, but she found tobacco hard going after a while."

They were putting in the part together, when into the shop ambled Uncle Herman.

"Herman," called Harry, "come give us a hand. Three heads is better than one even if they're swine heads."

Herman was a shambling, slabsided man with thick gray mustache, bushes of hair in his ears, big paws heavily coated, his huge body thoroughly packed in hair. The good old German would not let Moe go, hadn't seen him so long, wanted to know how tobacco was, was he having trouble with help—all that he wanted to know first hand.

Working in a New Haven arms factory, Herman explained, he was too tired to visit friends. "Come in. We got good coffee again," said the old man in his guttural voice, his faded eyes half covered by his thick gray eyebrows. "Ach, Moey, come. I tell you about that factory. It is something."

To the old man's great disappointment, Moe refused. He chewed the fat for a while with him and then made a quick getaway, afraid Harry's big rosy wife Babe, who kept both men under her thumb and never took "no" for an answer, would come after him.

The more that men like Harry and Herman shied away from tobacco, the more determined he was to show what he could do. War or no war, he would make it. War, hail, worms, buyers notwithstanding, this was his crop. He had been born in it, had been studying it as long as he could

remember. There must be a way of raising it to give a man at the end of the year the satisfaction of having done a job and made a dollar. Taking the farm over and being his own boss was the first step in that direction; the "cat" was the second; the others would follow.

When Moe wheeled into the yard, it was late. He was surprised to see the lights on in all the lower rooms. Maybe Rose Kahn had returned from her trip and was hanging around for him with that prize family of hers. Moe got out of the car and marched inside. His mother and father were alone. They were listening to the radio. Their faces were a deathly white.

His father gasped, "That Hitler! Moey, the Nazis have invaded Russia!"

Moe listened for a moment, and then left them. He went out into the cool air. Something pulled him to his fields. The full moon was up, flooding the whole world with silver. The tender little tobacco plants stood straight and glistened in the dew. For a long time he walked among them, straightening out a leaf here and there. When he reached the ridge from which he could see the whole farm and the surrounding valley—hills, terraces, and flats open in the moonlight like the palms of his hands—he stopped and stood stockstill. He cocked his thumbs, soaked with dew, into his belt and stared.

One by one, the lights died out in the valley. A cloud hid the moon. From the house, hidden by the poplars, the radio still blared.

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CHAPTER X

THE RADIO WAS ON DAY AND NIGHT. MOE HEARD IT ON THE bridge as he thundered over it in his Dodge, and when he got into the house he caught a glimpse of the old man crouching tensely before it.

Shaking his head, Moe yanked open the icebox, fixed himself a meat sandwich, and helped himself to a glass of milk.

His father groaned in the parlor. "Like Aaron's snake, he swallows up everything. Is there no one can stop that fiend?"

Mrs. Miller heard movements in the pantry. She came in, her eyes sunken from lack of sleep. Her lips trembled. "Moey, why didn't you tell me you were back?"

He moved to the window, tried to see the ridge on which Anton and the girls were hoeing.

"In the morning Anton cultivated ahead, and now they are hoeing together. Are you through with that bulldozer job?"

He nodded.

"Thank God! Now maybe you will stay home and not go running for work where the black pepper grows." She moved in a daze, and was so upset that she forgot to bawl him out for not observing the dietary laws, mixing his milk and meat. She hastened back to the parlor.

"The fiends are closing in on them, pushing them into the Pripet Marshes. I know the country well, Esther. In winter you can get through somehow. Summer, it's worse than

the Red Sea was for Pharaoh's army. You've got to go miles and miles around. What a poor land!"

"Poor as the night, Israel. But what will happen to our people? What, Israel?"

Moe pulled down the peak of his cap and went to join his help. He stopped among the birches along the edge of the field for his hoe. He had left it hanging on a branch, and half seriously, half in fun had warned the others not to use it, on penalty of having their heads broken. It was a long, smooth-handled ash, worn to his grip with his sweat and salt, the blade long and narrow and clean as a knife, touched up by a flat mill file which he kept in his pocket, so that it could slice through weeds and clods.

A simple tool was as important to Moe as a complicated piece of machinery, like a tractor or a truck. As a youngster, working for a grower by the name of Al Wood, he had learned how to care for tools. The tight, cantankerous Yankee had various hoes, and kept them bagged the way a golfer does his sticks. He used the broad blades for hoeing early in the morning, the light narrow blades during the afternoon when the heat made the plants limp so that the leaves hung down. Hoeing was a science with Wood, who hoed all his tobacco three times—the first time to get the weeds out, the second to break the crust, and the third to reinforce his plants against wind and rain.

As Moe raised his hands to bawl who in hell had run off with his hoe, he spotted the famous Cadillac 12 drawn up in the hay lot bordering the tobacco. Hy called it his jeep, his scout car for raiding the country for girls. Then, from the quill-like birches, fencing the other side of the field, Hy emerged, narrow-hipped and bare to the waist,

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his shirt down over his white ducks, like a loincloth. He twirled a hoe and yohoed, "Hi, Moo?"

Moe moved up the row fast. The rumhound and loafer had hoed next to Mary, had left double plants, and had in places dug curved marks as if he were playing marbles. Maybe he thought he was at the horse races or at a booze party. Moe said in a grating voice, "I think that hoe's mine."

Hy shuffled his moccasins and danced to one side. "What's the hurry, Moo? Here's a man come up to give you a hand, but you ain't got enough manners to say, 'Thank you, sir.' We ought to send you to a finishing school. He ought to be given a course in stable manners, hey, baby?"

Mary cast a keen sidewise glance at the boss and smiled. Anna and Anton, some distance below, could not hold their laughter.

The cud of tobacco exploded from Moe's mouth, and he reached for the hoe.

"The guy's still making black-leaf-forty with his chew tobacco and killing the bugs with it. I told Max Kahn just the other day, the only thing Moo can manage is a chew. He'd be lost trying to operate a farm, but he's got a good spurt. Maybe we can roll him over the fields to spray apples and potatoes." He prodded the huge, somber fellow in the belly.

Eyes blazing, Moe caught the hoe and yanked it out of Hy's hands, dropping him on his game knee.

When the Genghis rose, he dusted his hands slowly and smiled good-naturedly. "All right, ox, I get the hint." He swung around to Mary, who had been watching them with a poker face. "See you tonight, Red." He yawned. "Moo,

'bye, 'bye. One of these days you'll wake up without a head." He limped to his jeep and, with a languid motion, as though he had all the time in the world, started it. His siren shrieking, he departed.

Moe took up a handful of dirt and rubbed the handle with it, then he filed down the blade. He walked to the end of the row and started hoeing it over. By the time he had finished his line of plants, his rage had left him. He stopped among the birches, passed his thick black palm over his hoe, and touched it up again with his file.

The sisters were working briskly side by side. Anton was nowhere in sight. Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and he returned, talking loudly to himself. He had apparently gone to the house, for he was shaking his head sorrowfully. "Bad news. The radio says bad news."

The little Pole was barefooted. He started talking to the girls, moving backward like a crab, doing a sort of cake-walk, his mind ten thousand miles away from the tobacco he was menacing with his hoe. "That Herod! Burning children, killing women, old men. Jesus Christ, sonofabitch. I know the country he's ruining with his *armata*. When I was a boy, I worked there. I worked in Lithuania also. Once it was for a big strong Lithuanian who smoked a cherry *chibouk* three feet long. He took me in, hungry, dirty, my head full of Egyptian rams. Ak, he had a pretty daughter."

Moe's short upper lip curled in disgust.

Anton raised his eyes hastily to him. "That was long after Ludwicka died. Now if I was like Hyman, I would have made short work of that Lithuanian maiden."

Moe could no longer control himself. "Goddamn it, stop your yappin! You're in a tobacco lot, not Russia."

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"Ah," sighed Anton, "but that Hitler!"

"Hitler be damned. Boozin and yappin'll never stop him. He'll take Russia like he took Poland."

Anton paled.

"Sure," said Moe spitefully, working off his rage. "So forget it."

"How can you, Moey? First war, the Germans crack our necks—now again. The old country is a mother. America is a wife, a girl. How can you be forgetting the old mother?"

"You can forget for once the old hole you come from!"

Anna kicked up her long legs and laughed, but Mary was stern and white. Her strong mouth moved. "That's no way to talk."

Moe's face turned a dull red, and she went on: "If you don't like his work, say so. Don't take it out on him because Hy got your goat."

"Let him tend to his work, the drunk!"

The little Pole blinked on the verge of tears. "Moey, Moey, only thing I drink today was Adamski's ale." He crossed himself. "Last time I was drunk was long ago on Dyngus Day in Easter."

Moe dug his hoe savagely into the ground. "Then get to work!" Striking out hard, he outdistanced them all, and worked apart from them.

When the mills on the river blew their five o'clock whistles, Moe gave no sign that he had heard. Mary shouldered her hoe and left, her sister and Anton behind her.

In the evening Miller, seeking Moe, found him at his desk. "Must a man be drunk to remember his homeland? I don't understand you, Moey."

"There's nathin to understand."

"I know Anton better than you do. True, life has become a saloon to him, and when he can no longer pay, the end will come like one of those strong hired men and bounce him out into the darkness. But who are we to judge him? He is a man you can talk to, he has a heart and some understanding. He left a wife and children in Poland. Your mother and I are not stones. Your mother's sister is there; your own blood. After all, you are still a Jew."

"There you go Jewin me again."

Miller was beginning to lose his temper. "I speak to you as a man, then!"

Moe pushed his time book aside and, reaching for some tobacco leaves, started rolling himself a cigar, his powerful burned neck bent. Twisting the binder, he glanced up.

The old man's sick eye was leaking. He rubbed his creased forehead in his agitation, saying softly, "I think you are overworked, son. You have put yourself on the edge of a knife. Even a young lion can grab too much. Are you listening?"

Wearily Moe muttered, "Yeh, yeh, I heard you." He puffed his cigar, filling the room with smoke until it was like a hotbox. His ears burned. He could not forget the hard face and the anger and contempt of that Mary. She was right; if not for that whoremaster Hy, nothing would have happened.

Next morning Anton did not show up. Moe went to his shack, and it was empty. Cursing himself for a fool, he stamped back to the field.

Long after he had given up hope of seeing him on the job, Anton appeared, staggering through the birches. There was

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an expression of great astonishment on his face, and he kept looking up at the sky, wobbling from side to side, singing a religious hymn.

"Christus walked on earth, Moey, but I, Antoni Bartasus, I walk on whiskey." He searched for his hoe. Suddenly he sank to his knees and bowed his head to the earth. A horrible tearing sound came from him. He started vomiting.

Moe walked up and stood over him. "Hey, Anton." He laid his huge paw on the thin shoulder. "Here, try this." He held out a handful of tobacco scraps.

Anton's bloodless lips moved over the powerful brown leaf, and he chewed. With a groan, he sat up, bunching his back. He had the same suffering, bewildered look that had appeared on his face yesterday.

The girls tried to help him, but he pushed them away, shrilly ordering them to mind their own pots and keep their noses out of his trousers.

Moe said, "Let him alone. He'll be all right now." The girls followed him back to work.

Later, Anton crawled out of the birches and feebly scratched around with his hoe.

CHAPTER XI

THE FOLEY GIRLS WERE WORKERS. THEY DIDN'T GO WATERING themselves or running into the bushes every five minutes. You could see they took after Steve, who was a good farmer, and after their mother, who before the tail got into her eyes could outhoe and outcut half the men in the valley.

Alike as the girls were in their work, they were as different as sisters could be in other respects. Both had been hired out to city people when they were kids, and Anna never forgot it. Tall and pretty, with long eyes, she wore gloves to protect her hands, showed up in flashy slacks and halters and high-heeled pumps, said "nyether" instead of "neither," and put on lady airs. But when she broke one of her long fingernails, she ripped out an oath and was heart-broken. She collected eyelashes; she said boldly to Moe, "You know you got nice eyes and nice lashes. Let me pull one."

Mary reminded you of her stocky Polish father. She wore old clothes, usually the bloomer-like trousers and broken sneakers, occasionally a bit of ribbon in her hair. Her broad hands and freckled face were burned and roughened by the sun. While Anna sang and worked her eyes, Mary was tight-lipped and absorbed in her own thoughts.

The girls didn't get along. They were always scrapping about the sick baby. Spending sleepless nights, it didn't take much to make them fly at each other's throats.

Coming up with a jug of water, Moe heard them at it again. "What is he—a bear? Soften him up with your eyes and ask him. Stay home and take care of your baby, instead of having ma do it. You can go without ramming around nights for a while."

"Look who's yappin!"

"I ain't got a baby!"

"Not yet.

"All right, not yet, darling."

Anna glared with suppressed fury at her sister, but she made no attempt to put the question to Moe. It was Mary,

cold and hard-eyed, who asked him to take them back for lunch so that the baby could be attended to.

Flanked by the girls, Mary on the running board, Anna, who had hopped in, as if it were a lark, on the seat next to him, he roared to their place. Mrs. Foley was lying on the grass under the catalpa tree which stood on the bank beside the house. She was holding the baby. When the big blowzy woman saw who it was bringing her daughters back, she snickered and went down to the road to meet them. Moe was away, his motor drowning out her deep man's voice, before she could get off the bank.

Back for the girls in a half-hour, he waited, honking the horn. Reluctantly, he got out, walked up the bank, and rapped at the kitchen door. It swung open. He looked helplessly from a picture of the Blessed Virgin, *Panna Matka*, to one of a girl raising her skirt to fix her garter.

There was the rustle of a dress. Anna issued from an inner room. She was naked to the waist, and her goatlike breasts with their swollen nipples swung as she walked toward him. She smiled. "Do you want to see the little bastard that's making all the trouble for you, Moey?"

Voices outside made her pretty face knot disagreeably. She retreated into the shadows of her room, while Moe backed out into Mrs. Foley and Mary, who were coming from the outhouse smoking and talking animatedly.

"Ain't the duchess ready yet?" asked Mary, throwing her cigarette away.

Moe plunged down the bank. He put his hands, bathed in sweat from the encounter in the house, on the wheel and hoisted himself into the safety of the cab.

Cooky's pet billy goat trotted after Mary and picked up

her cigarette. Blatting madly, he pranced about, his piece of a tail stiff. Blowing wind and snorting, he rushed into the pasture, dashed here and there, and then leaped with a cry into the woods.

Mrs. Foley slapped her haunches and laughed until the tears rolled down her coarse red face. "Billy, watch out. You ain't the first man picked up somethin from a girl and got burned."

Mary threw a glance at the truck and then returned her gaze to her mother. She smiled faintly.

When Anna came out, all powdered like a mealbug, Mary was seated in the cab. Anna squeezed viciously against her, and while the two jockeyed this way, Moe's face flushed violently and he felt like a fool. He twisted around, on the verge of telling the pair he'd be hanged if he'd drive them up again, but then he thought better of it and mastered his anger.

They were hoeing on the highest field. The whole valley was visible from the slope, with flashes of the river and the blue Avon hills. The soil was heavy loam here. What made it hard for the hoers were the fern roots and the bayberry stumps. A stiff breeze from the river poked among the plants, raising skirts of dust.

This tobacco was slow. To give it a little push, Moe brought out his wheelbarrow fertilizer-spreader and trucked up bags of cottonseed meal and castor pumace, dropping them along the fences. He loaded his wheelbarrow and trundled it down the rows.

The breeze carried the fertilizer over the plants. Moe feared the plants would burn. If Anton were straightened out, he would have had him cultivate directly after him, so

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that the fertilizer would be in the ground before the breeze could do much with it. But in his present condition, the Bartasus couldn't even hoe right. Again Moe walked over to explain that he wanted the soil raked up to reinforce the plants.

"Look, I ain't cultivatin now, so I want this fertilizer brought close to the tobacco. Don't dig under the plants. You'll have them buddin before their time, Tony."

Anton's skinned-looking eyes shot fire. "I hoe right."

Turning from the stubborn pecking man, Moe cried out in desperation, "Why don't you watch somebody that knows how? Look at Mary."

Anton's face reddened, his spare yellow mustache bristled. Moe knew he had blundered. Before he could make amends for the insult, Anna horned in to show how it should be done. "Cacko!" shouted Anton, pushing her.

Moe walked away, grinding his teeth in impotent rage. He picked up a bag, ripped it open to make an apron around the lip of the wheelbarrow. The breeze kicked it; the fertilizer drizzled over the plants. He tied the apron down with a string pulled off the bags. Shaken by the rough going, the string snapped.

As Moe knelt and clumsily knotted the string with his big, thick-fingered hands, a shadow fell across the wheelbarrow. He paid no attention to it, thinking it the shadow of one of the hawks constantly patrolling the field. A clump of dirt rolled against his knee. He saw the familiar sneakers, the sturdy, brown, bare legs.

Mary took a couple of bobby pins from her hair. Squatting beside him, she pinned the sides of the apron together. "Try it," she said.

He went up and down the row. The apron held. He grunted his thanks.

She bent her head. "You oughtn't of said how good I am. Tony's on the warpath again."

Anton and Anna were hoeing abreast of each other, and the Pole was branding the shrieking girl everything under the sun—a wild duck that had never had a garland, a she-lizard, a stupid calf raised behind a stove.

Mary smiled. "Now why didn't you use Anna as a model for him to follow?"

Suspecting that she was fishing for praise, he said curtly, "I say what I mean."

The hard, set expression, with its trace of contempt for him, was no longer on her face. She laughed. "Well, I ain't going to fight you about that."

"Everything's going ass-backwards!" He broke off, but the girl faced him attentively, as if unaware that he had said anything out of the way. "I counted on him to do all the cultivatin," Moe went on. "If he can't handle a hoe till he snaps out of this, he sure can't handle no horse-cultivator."

"Anna used to be pretty good with a cultivator. Those legs of hers cover lots of ground. I ain't forgot it either. Give it to one of us, and Anton'll never forgive you."

Moe had to acknowledge the wisdom of her remark, but he was desperate; he could not allow anything to interfere with the crop. Next morning, when Anton did not show up in time, he shouted to Mary to come up from her hoeing and take over the cultivating.

The mare, hitched to the cultivator, was restless. There were plenty of beelike wobbleflies around because of the heat, and one kept darting down to land its eggs on her

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fetlocks. Moe caught the fly and crushed it between his fingers. "I got to shave your legs, old gal," he muttered.

As Moe straightened up from his crouch, he saw Mary. She was studying him with a cool, detached, somewhat puzzled air. Flustered by her frank gaze, he said thickly, "I got to finish the fertilizer. You handle the mare, and Anton can ride his bottle for a fall."

"Why can't you try Anna?"

"I'm tellin' you," he said through his teeth. He showed her how to adjust the levers. "This cross-wrench'll help you with the sweep. If the sweep is too deep, she makes trenches, and we don't want that. Where it's sandy, we want that sweep shallower. Up here, with the heavy loam, it's all right if it goes deeper. The mare is good. She'll make the turns without no trouble. Don't let her go too slow; the sweep won't swing the dirt under the plants."

As Mary concentrated on his lecture, little lines appeared on the broad bridge of her nose. She put her hands on the cultivator handles, her lips parted, and a glint of amusement lit up her eyes.

Moe's reserve and curtness fell away. In showing her how to stand and hold the lines, he went so far as to put one of the sweaty saddles of his hands lightly on her arm, so driven by necessity, so engrossed was he in what he had to say. "Some fellas like the lines around their hips. Some on a shoulder."

He stepped away, glancing down the field to where there was a beating in the underbrush. Anton emerged. He advanced on them fiercely. "You, you, there's only one horse you can handle, the horse that all women——"

"All right, Tony," laughed Mary. "All right," she repeated in an exaggerated submissive voice.

Up the field flew the cultivator, the mare's tail paid out, the little Pole galloping after with his shirt tails flying. He stumbled, fell, caught hold of the handles, and was dragged along for a few feet, until the frightened mare stopped.

Moe spat. "Boozehounds! Got to be slopped all the time with rum and women."

The smile died on the girl's face. "Better to go crazy over women than some other things," she said coldly, and walked off to join her sister.

Dumfounded, Moe stared after her. Then his attention shifted to Anton, but Bartasus had calmed down and was breaking the crust slowly. Feeling that his manhood had been doubted, put to shame by the sisters, he worked soberly.

The day was a long hot one. The night was close. It was stifling in Moe's room. He had to get up to open the doors and windows. From all over the valley came the bang of firecrackers, the sound breaking like stones being thrown into a wagonbox. Moe remembered that it was the eve of the Fourth of July, and the girls were not coming to work next day because of the holiday. It took him a long time to fall asleep.

About daybreak it started to rain. He decided to let Anton remain in his shack and sleep off the last effects of his long drunk. He himself went out to look at his tobacco. A few plants needed resetting where cutworms had got at them.

The shower passed. The sky remained gloomy and overcast. Firecrackers and salutes kept rattling in the valley. He

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was bent over a plant in the field near the road when a car flew by, raising a sheet of water. It was the jeep. Mary rose from her seat beside Hy and waved her hand, and then she was pulled down.

Long after the car had disappeared, Moe heard her gay laughter. His feet were as heavy as clods as he slogged over the field.

CHAPTER XII

COOKY BOUNDED ACROSS THE BROOK AND DARTED INTO THE field, bursting with the news that the girls were not coming to work.

"Too much Fourth of July?" Moe said sourly.

Tilting up his bony little chin, the kid quivered, "Naw, it's the baby. The baby—aw, Moe, I ain't gonna be no uncle no more."

Moe dropped his eyes and dug his hoe into the ground. "So the old doc didn't do no good?"

"Mary says the best doctor couldn't do nathin."

Moe nodded.

Cooky's bright green eyes cleared. He squinted up at Moe, his nose sharp as an awl, his crown-like cap cocked at a jaunty angle. "What about a job, big stuff? I'm lookin for work."

Moe's lips twitched in amusement. "Try the great Genghis. Your sister likes him. She'll get a job for you."

"Hell with him. He ain't no farmer, and I don't need no sister to get me a job. I wear me own pants. You gonna give me a job. I'll ruin you if you don't."

Moe bared his big tobacco-stained teeth and laughed.

Cooky pleaded, argued, stormed. He clenched his fists and left with a curse. A few minutes later he was yelping in the brook in a hunt for water spiders, which he called Jesus-Christ boats. He leaped out, his little catpiece slapping around, and fired a stone at Moe.

At noon Mrs. Miller brought him into the kitchen and fed him, wincing when she saw his troubles with his twisted mouth. The old man sat next to him, called him an imp and a *koon*das, and told him he could sleep in the extra cot in Moe's room. But Cooky, conscious that he was the only living man in the family, trotted home to carry his full share of the burden.

Mrs. Miller visited to comfort the bereaved family. She returned, bitterly denouncing Anna. "The baby is not cold yet, and she is already running around like a poisoned mouse. Two sisters, but what a world of difference, like day from night. Moey, I'm afraid she is not coming back to work."

"I'll get along without her," muttered Moe. The picture of the girl advancing toward him in the kitchen was stubbornly present before his mind.

His mother cast a stealthy glance at him and said in an uncertain voice, "They don't eat so well. You know they have no car. I said you wouldn't mind taking them to the store Saturday night."

Moe frowned. He resented his mother's making up his mind for him. Besides, he had an old engine in his shed which he had planned to break down the same night.

"Well, Moey?"

"I didn't say no," he answered grumpily.

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"At least you could say it in a nicer way. Here are people working for you. Can't you do them a little favor?" Her eyes filled.

The old man had been strangely silent during the conversation. The last few days he had acted as if he couldn't do too much for her. She had taken the death of this child like a personal loss, and now that Moe had a moment to reflect on it, he knew she was thinking of the baby girl, the sister he had never seen.

She put her small hand on his thick, sweaty arm, asking again if he would take the Foleys, and Moe repeated stubbornly, "I didn't say no."

Anton learned about the trip, and at the last moment he decided that he, too, had to shop at the package store. He spruced himself up in his green W.P.A. camp trousers, a blue workshirt, his tugboat shoes, and a black leather cap.

When the Dodge rolled into the back road, another car was waiting below the bank. Anna sailed out of the house, wearing a floppy cartwheel hat and a red lacquer pocket-book on her shoulder. She cried gaily, "Hullo, Moo. Hullo, Tony."

In the dusk on the steps sat a lonely figure. As the other car moved away, Mary rose and came down to them. Her voice was tired and raspy. "Ma thought you wasn't coming. Babe, Mrs. Horton, went to Hartford this afternoon and took her along."

Moe gawked at her, open-mouthed. He had told Cooky he would be over on time.

From behind the goat shed, the boy bounced, with a smoldering catalpa pod dangling from the corner of his mouth.

"Hey, Irish," called Moe, "didn't I tell you I was comin'?"

"Sure. The old woman and sis had a scrap. Sis hollered her head off, and she said she didn't want no favors."

"Cooky!" cried his sister.

"Then she took on Anna for sayin she was tryin to get under you, and Anna said it ain't egg in her beer what she does. Boy, did Mary dish it out! You shoulda been here, Moey."

Mary made a grab for him, but he blew smoke into her face and danced away. He butted with his head, punched out with his fists, and then, with a yelp, dived down the bank, rolling head over heels.

Anton, in the rear of the car, began laughing. "Don't mind that little bullfrog, Manieschka, and come with us. Come, I treat you to drinks."

The girl's face was veiled by the thickening dusk. She was silent.

"We're goin to town anyway," Moe said awkwardly. He spat over the side of the car to hide his embarrassment. "There's plenty room."

He heard the intake of her breath. "Oh, all right. I'll come if you're going." She took a sweater, ordered the protesting Cooky to stick to the house, and got in beside Moe.

Anton started a hymn in his high-pitched voice. He broke off to say the work in the field was missing her. Yes, he added slyly, the hoe needed her.

Mary shifted in her seat. "Did you speak to Martin Shabot about Cheney hiring more help? You told me, when you was over with Mrs. Miller, that his niece Helen was working there."

Anton scratched his head. "Helen says they lay off now.

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No silk comin. Soon they make only those parachutes for fly soldiers, and they takin on more girls."

Moe had the wind knocked out of him by the girl's question. He had been counting on her to hang on until after cutting time. Now, without warning, she was going off. This blasted help! you couldn't depend on any of them, no matter how good they were.

Moe waited anxiously for her to say more. Staring straight ahead, he demanded, "Tobacco gettin you?"

"That ain't it. I just figured to hold on until something better come along. Family got into a jam. There was the baby, and Cooky needs looking after. The baby's gone, and things are different." She spoke listlessly.

They crossed the river and the old canal into Windsor Locks. When they stopped the car in the parking space before the railroad station, she was the first to get out. Anton hopped after her. The two headed for a package store. Moe had a prescription filled out for a salve for his father's eye, and he bought himself some broadleaf cigars.

Later on, standing on the street corner waiting for the pair, Moe couldn't get Mary's remarks out of his mind. He would have to be ramming around the country again looking for help. Time was when he considered the question of help part of the day's work, like greasing a machine or hitching a horse. He was beginning to realize it meant far more than that. It made him uneasy the moment he tried to see the help question from all angles. He ought to speak to Mary as man to man, but he wouldn't know how to begin. Suddenly he felt low in spirits and dog-tired. As he crossed the street to the car, Anton and Mary appeared, loaded down with packages.

Anton panted, "Moey, we got to blow the young master. Come have beer with us."

Moe made a face.

Mary looked at him. She said cheerfully, "How about wine?"

He shook his head.

"Afraid you'll get drunk?"

"A little beer or *bobsky pibo* make me drunk?" he said, aroused. "Hell, I ain't never been drunk."

Anton caught his arm. "Don't spoil our night and sit on us like a blind horse. Be a sportsman, Moey."

With the corner of his eye, Moe caught the taunting look on Mary's face. Hitching up his shoulders, he followed them into the tavern. They sat at a small round table. Anton ordered the beer, twisted his yellow, threshed-out mustache, and sang out the items listed on a sign which added up to the charge for a hard-boiled egg: "Cock's service, wear and tear on the hen, federal tax, etc."

After two rounds of beer, Moe wouldn't have a drop more. Mary put a nickel into the jukebox, leaped up and snapped her fingers. Her moodiness had dropped off her like an old dress. She was a different person. Her wide gray eyes were warm and friendly. "Can you polka, boss? It's simple, just a two-step." She stretched out her hands to him, but Anton cried, "I got a *randka* with you," and snatched her and whirled away over the floor.

In the middle of the dance, one of Anton's shoes flew off. He recovered the shoe, and, with his carp's mustache bristling because of the laughter, took Mary in his arms again and spun her around. A couple of men at the bar watched the girl.

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Moe looked on for a while with a flushed face. He got up, paid at the bar for the beers, and went out to the car. He stretched out in the back of the car with a cracking of the bones. It was strange how a shot of beer had gotten him in the head. The fear that the girl might not show up for work dogged him. He might have to give up the tractor job he had landed just a few days ago near the flying field on the edge of the town. Hell, it was a free country. She could do what she damn pleased. He pulled at his cigar and closed his heavy eyes.

When he awoke with a start, he felt something around his neck. He grunted, threw off the sweater, and sat up with a shiver. Mary was in the driver's seat, thoughtfully smoking. He looked around him in bewilderment. They were parked near a field.

She was looking at him now over her shoulder. Her voice was drowsy. "Anton ran out on us. You were sleeping peaceful like a newborn baby, and I wouldn't wake you. I pulled up right here."

Hastily he clambered out. His bones ached and his hands were stiff. Out in the field he could just make out tiny tobacco plants spiking the ground. In the east there was a crack of light.

"Christ, you shoulda kicked me awake!" He rubbed the gum out of his eyes and peered at her uncertainly. "Where in the devil did that Polack scoot?"

"He was half in the bag when I went out to call you. I went back—he'd just skipped." Smiling at him, she slipped into her sweater.

Grumbling and swearing, Moe drove back to the tavern. It was closed. He drove through the town, got out to look

into the alleys, inquired at a diner, stopped off at the station. Finally, he crossed the canal and the river and raced toward his own country as if Beelzebub were on his tail.

When he and Mary lurched over the ruts and stopped below the bank on which stood the catalpa tree, the sun was up. Steam was rising from the fields and fences. Moe helped her get the packages out of the car.

"You could stay for breakfast," she said. Her broad, strong-boned face looked fresh, and she invited him with a slow smile. Her sister smiled the same way.

He reddened and beat a hasty retreat down the bank. Before he got into his car, it struck him that he owed her an explanation. "I got plenty work today," he said lamely.

She smiled as if she understood.

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT MOE COULDN'T GET OVER WAS THAT LIKE A LUNK-head he had failed to ask the girl if she was quitting. He chucked his cigar away, and, groggy, as if the beer were still working in him, he entered the farmhouse.

His father was pacing the kitchen. His mother ceased pleating the tablecloth. "What happened?" she burst out.

"Nathin." He dropped into a chair. A drop of sweat worked its way out of his knotted hair and ran down his heavy forehead.

"Trouble with the car?" asked the old man hoarsely.

"Naw."

"Where's Anton? Did you quarrel with him again?"

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Moe raised his swollen eyelids and stared at his mother as if he did not understand her question.

Pressing her body against the table, she demanded, "Speak! Am I a stone? I was up all night."

"Nobody took a piece out of me."

"Moe," said the old man in despair, "you sit here as if you were ten thousand miles away, in Yahoopitz or Kamtchatka."

Staring at them both wearily, Moe asked, "Is this a draft board, I got to answer all them questions?"

Miller said bitterly, "Why must I break these things up for you? If you were a restless lad, with oats in his behind, we could understand. But a quiet boy—Tell your mother where you've been and make an end of this."

"Enough times she went to the city and didn't give a hoot where I spent my nights. Now when I oversleep in the car, she raises the roof."

Mrs. Miller flinched at the accusation. She looked at the old man for help, but he had his back to her. Unable to meet the angry gleam in the boy's eye, she bent her head a little. "Couldn't you have said that at first?" she asked, with a catch in her voice. "What a night we spent! You don't know what happened. Hymie is looking for you. He needs your help. While the family was away, somebody broke into the synagogue, threw the holy books around, and wrote, 'Knittin for Britain' over the Ark."

"Worse than that." The old man's voice became harsh with the sense of that outrage. "Because we are Jews, who believe in helping crush the enemy of mankind, they wrote, 'Shittin for Britain.'"

"Israel!" cried his wife, turning scarlet.

"The truth is the truth. Hymie says it's Pudims, those Germans, those hateful tubs of guts."

Moe shrugged his shoulders. "And maybe it's Dominick Payday. I got nathin against Pudims."

Mrs. Miller, aghast, stared at him.

"Let Harry Horton, he's justice of peace, or a state cop take care of them. What kind of a police officer is Hy? His dogs ruined the pheasant farm, and he got away with it. His truck killed one of the kids workin for the plantation, and when they got a warrant out for him, you put him in a safe place—your skirt."

"We must protect our own," cried his mother.

The old man gave her an unhappy, distracted glance. He wished she weren't always so ready to defend Hyman, and he was beginning to believe that Moe bitterly resented his mother's warmth for the handsome rascal.

"That Hy don't do no more farmin than an aphis," Moe went on. "He gets away with murder, and the army don't take him. Otto Pudims can farm, and he don't go boozin and whoorin and blowin around the country in no Cadillac, either. The Genghis, great Jew! Look who you got to protect Jews!"

Mrs. Miller drew her slender figure up to its full height. "Israel, will you allow a son of yours to go on this way?" she asked imperiously.

The old man cast an imploring, respectful look at the boy, who with his thumbs cocked into his belt, rose and walked out. "It is hard to answer the truth, Esther. I am afraid the angel who redeems us from evil will bless the lad for his outspokenness."

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Mrs. Miller thrust him off. "You are no father. All you can do is say something from a book and joke."

He went to the window and stared cheerlessly at that bull-necked son of his, on his way toward the brook, planting each foot down like a plank over seed.

Moe crossed the brook and went into the shack, hoping that Anton had already returned. Not finding him in, he went up to the ridge to trim birches and chokecherry trees in the fences, which had interfered with the cultivating. He went at it lustily, and as he worked he faced again his problem: Mary was looking for another job, she might not show up Monday and, like a rube, he hadn't made certain of her intentions. What also got him was that here was a Foley who had sat up half the night with him in a lonely spot on the road and hadn't made a move to pull up her dress. That he couldn't figure out at all.

Moe circled the field, chopping the young trees with his bushhook and piling up the brush. Once he paused to swab his face and gaze speculatively at the woods through which ran the short-cut to the Foley farm. Then he saw, coming up the ridge, Rose Kahn. The family had expected her last night, but she had had the car trouble on her return trip which he had forseen.

Rose was squat, like her father, with a broad bottom and big breasts. She had large soft eyes and a singularly sweet voice, which made people forget her unattractive figure.

"Oh, Moe," she sang out, "do you ever rest?"

"When I ain't workin'," he said seriously.

"And when is that?" She took the heavy bushhook and spread her legs. "Let me help." She gave a tree a glancing blow. The hook was twisted out of her hands.

Moe gave a sour smile. "You make one hell of a farmer, Rosie. Almost like my mother."

"Almost?" she asked, fixing her eyes hopefully on him.

"Well," he had to admit, "you'd have to be pretty bad to be like her."

"Oh, you always forget Aunt Esther was a city girl. She was just out of her short dresses when she came here."

Rose had a deep affection for Mrs. Miller, called her Aunt Esther, and, though she believed it was not right of her, she welcomed with a secret joy being compared with the mother of this boy to her own advantage. "But I'm a country girl, and I'm built to be a farmer's wife." She reddened under his morose, indifferent eyes, and, dropping her hands, which had roosted for a moment on her broad hips, switched her gaze to the fields rolling down toward the river.

"Moe, I couldn't wait till I got back to our own country. Canada is grand, but there's nothing like our valley. The smell of the soil here, the green things, why, it makes something turn inside me."

She wasn't putting on a show, but she talked too much, often like a book. Now she opened up about her trip—the Evangeline country of Nova Scotia, Montreal, Quebec, the town opposite Detroit named Windsor. She had seen tobacco near the Saint Lawrence, and she had pictures of sheds and fields.

As she was talking with spirit, seeing that she had him interested, the old iron rail, hanging in the yard, clanged in the hot still air. "There's the dinner bell. The beadle came with us. They're so upset about the synagogue, the old

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people. It's terrible. Do you think Otto Pudims did it, Moe?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Looks more like that forger and drunk."

She sighed. "I thought of that Dominick, too, but if I told Papa, he'd fly off the handle."

Rose wasn't a bad kid. She took after her mother, who had been an honest, hard-working woman, but, like her mother, she accepted Max Kahn's word as law and was crazy over that brother of hers, wasting herself trying to keep those two wolves from tearing each other to pieces.

She waited patiently for Moe, standing just out of the sweep of the hook, a heavy matronly girl with a plain troubled face.

At last the fences were cleared. She followed him, carrying the pitchfork. He walked several steps ahead of her. As he wheeled to take the footpath, he caught her eyes running over his body; her glance, always mild and resigned, was fierce. He halted, momentarily flustered. The hot blood flooded her face, and there was a pulse in her throat. He took the pitchfork, pulling it, almost gently, from her grasp. "It's hard to lug. One of them long-handled things," he stuttered.

On the porch, waiting for them, was Mrs. Miller, wearing a blue dress and white pumps. "Ach, what was taking you so long, Rose? Didn't you tell our boy dinner was ready?"

Rose had recovered her composure and was her mild self. "I didn't want to nag."

Mrs. Miller bit her lip, but she couldn't keep the bossy

tone out of her voice. "Go and change, Moe. You'll eat with Rose."

As Moe went to his room, he looked into the parlor for Anton. He saw the beadle and Max Kahn and his father, and the old man was lecturing the other two with plenty of fire. Moe could hear him while he was dressing.

"As Jews, we must be careful not to let our enemies pick up sticks and use them against us. The Jew can be the difference between the devil and God. Does it not say 'Shad' for the devil and 'Shadi' for God, and Yood is the difference?"

The beadle stroked his sharp, little, grizzled beard. "That is true, Reb Iser. But those gentiles! How can people do such things? First, they throw a dead dog, wrapped in that 'Socialist Justice,' into the synagogue, and then——"

" 'Social Justice,' you mean."

"Nu, 'Socialist Justice,' and then that foul writing on the wall. Even Balaam's ass would not splatter that way."

"Perhaps, but we must make sure who is responsible."

Seated in an easy chair, piled high with cushions, Max Kahn remained silent. As his old friend made the point that it was possible some of the dissatisfied plantation workers had broken into the synagogue, Max frowned and picked at a candle stub. Often he had tobacco farmers on his string long after the regular buying season, and so he always carried a candle with him for testing the leaf in the bundle.

When Moe entered the room, the dark look was wiped completely off Kahn's face. "Well, Moey, how is the tobacco?"

"It's comin'."

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"I been so busy I didn't have no chance to look at it. I'm getting Rose as my assistant buyer. How does his tobacco look, girl?"

Rose said promptly, "What a question, papa?"

"Listen to that! 'What a question?' Without thinking at all. You'll hurt my business, so I'll have to give him a better price. Everything about him is 'What a question?' to you."

Rose, who was serving Moe, hurried into the kitchen with a laugh.

Max moved restlessly in his seat. "Ach, if only that wild Indian, her brother, did me half as much good as the girl."

Mrs. Miller came to defense of the boy. "Max, that is no way to talk. Hymie didn't sleep all night because you were worried and the synagogue was fouled."

"No man is altogether a *dreck*," admitted Kahn. "So for one day he will not go running after *shicksas*. I told him I'd break his neck if he'd bring in a *shicksa* for a wife. There's that red-haired one, that—"

"Papa, please," begged Rose. "Why must you talk that way? Uncle Israel, stop him."

"It's his hemorrhoids, his Philistine disease, speaking," said Miller. "We don't agree about labor, Max. We don't agree about the war, about Hy, who should be allowed to join the army at once. There are many things we don't agree about, but you must admit you are not as young as the Max who slapped the policeman in our village back home for molesting a little old woman peddling bread. Speak and confess you are overworking, that your hemorrhoids are tormenting you."

Whatever his neighbors could say about Kahn, all had to admit he was a worker, sweating himself as well as others,

ruining his once great strength. Often, when things were not going well in the field, he would jump in and outwork his Polish and Lithuanian help in spite of the blood and the unwilling tears wrung out of him.

Max said flatly, "Reb Iser, you talk like a schoolteacher. Work never hurt a man. It's worry. If I could have those Communists and Anti-Semites where I have my hemorrhoids, I'd feel better. You have heard about that hearing in Hartford. A Congressman is calling every tramp, bum, and drunkard to let the world know how bad we treat our help. Every good-for-nothing in George's place is going to that hearing like to a saloon. Every time we get a chance to make a little money on a crop, those Communists in Washington start trouble."

Moe remembered he had to settle his help question today. He had heard Max brand everybody who was in his way as Communist and Anti-Semite so often it was beginning to bore him. He rose, muttering that he had some work to do, and walked out.

Max made a face. "That boy still has it against me because I tried to hire that drunken Polack. Nu, where is your Bartasus today?"

Miller ignored the question. There was a gleam in his eye. He said, "Max, here is a boy who is the field man, the Esau come to life among us again."

"Make a benediction over sweet oil, you fortunate man."

Miller looked gratefully at his old friend. "I have told Esther that we Jews were great enough to bring forth the Jacob as well as the Esau, and now it seems to me is the day of the Esau. I used to be disappointed." The sick side of his face twitched. "There was another one of my neigh-

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bors who used to say this lump of mine is gold. You remember Alter Jacobs who lost his farm because his boys went to the city. One became a doctor, another a lawyer, a third a college professor. Jacobs used to say to me, 'Where is it written that your son must spend his days with his nose in a book?' "

"Amen," growled Kahn. "What good did books do that son of mine?"

Miller continued, with a faraway look in his eyes: "Alter Jacobs, a good Jew with a long beard and earlocks. A fine Jew. I've heard him say: 'Never force a child. Let a grown child do what he pleases.' "

Mrs. Miller exchanged swift glances with Rose, fearing the two would start another argument over Hy.

The old man's voice was unusually tender. "Our patriarch would go out with a scythe, put his beard into his shirt, where it hung like a small praying-shawl, and cut grass like a peasant. Ah, how he loved this land here. But the boys wanted to go. He let them go, Max. He let them go."

Max Kahn got the point and brooded distrustfully. In her nervousness, Mrs. Miller pleated the tablecloth, and Rose went up to her Uncle Israel, as she loved to call him, and put a restraining hand on his shoulder.

He raised his hand to meet hers. His face shone. "Ah, the old days when the parents and children still stayed together. Do you remember all the Jewish families we would get together here Saturday night? The Cohens, the Levys, Tannenbaums, Kramers and Schwarzes. We would read and sing. Gone are those days like last year's snow."

Sadly he shook his head. He raised his tired eyes and

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saw Moe standing on the porch rolling with great determination one of his broadleaf cigars, and then Miller started singing under his breath, his voice growing stronger and more spirited as he got into the verse:

Let us all sing, let us all sing
A ditty.
Lachem is bread,
Bosor v'dogim
V'chol matamim.

"It's '*matramim*,' " said the beadle and shochet and cantor, stabbing the air with his long gray thumbnail.

"I think you are wrong, neighbor.

Tell me, Rabbi, dear,
What is lachem?
To the rich
Lachem is a fresh roll.
And to the poor?
Oh, woe; oh, to the poor
Lachem is a crust of bread.

Out in the yard a cracked, high-pitched voice caught up the song. Anton staggered forward, bedraggled, holding his trousers with a fist.

Gleefully, Miller leaped to his feet. "Women, get him food. Anton, you know this song. I'll put the question to you, and you answer."

Bartasus bent a knee and bowed, and then he turned to Moe, who had been wrestling with himself on the porch. "Young master, do not be angry with your *probek*. I got lost." He crossed himself. "I swear. I tried to get a Lithua-

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nian to drive me back early in the morning to help you with the fences. But Lithuanians are not men, they are tailors. He beat me up, and made a mask of my face."

Anton belched and politely covered his mouth. "Be careful, that Ruby Foley is a *fatum*. She will not put melon or black soup on the table; all suitors are taken if they can pay. Mary, she is different, a good daughter, a fine girl, you can copy a poem for her. But better get a healthy fat girl who knows how to cook cabbages and potatoes."

Miller noticed his wife's white face. He cried boisterously to hide from the others her agitation, "Anton, how you chatter! Come, let us sing. I'll put the question. You'll answer."

"*Primo, secundo*," cried Anton, flopping into a chair.

"Now, 'Rabbi dear, what is meat to the rich?'"

"'Goose,'" cried Anton, twisting his scraggly yellow mustache, which looked like a beaten head of barley.

"'What is meat to the poor?'"

"'Lung and liver.'"

"'Fish to the rich?'"

"'Live carp.'"

"'To the poor?' May God multiply them."

"'Herring,' Old Testament."

"'Matranim, matanim,' meaning sweets. Oh, beadle, you've confused me," cried Miller, staring at his wife in dismay. She hadn't got into the spirit of the song and was picking at the tablecloth.

He smote his hands together. "If I can not teach the Jews any longer, I can at least teach the gentiles." He went up to the window. "Moe, come join us in a happy song."

Moe had slipped away and was crossing the upper fields.

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Wafted by the hot afternoon breeze, he heard his name called, but he went on and entered the woods. The wagon track was covered with grass as high as his knees. In places where the sun bored through, the light fell on patches of sweet fern and briers. A catbird mewed, perched on a pile of brush, its tail pumping.

The wagon track ran through a birch lot, then through a pasture, and into a back road. Overlooking the road was the small unpainted Foley house. The place seemed deserted except for the goat, which stood under the catalpa tree stamping its hoofs. A door clapped. Mary came out and sat on the steps. She was alone.

Resolutely, Moe threw his cigar away. Bracing his heavy shoulders, he walked up the grassy bank. The girl rose. The discontented expression on her face disappeared, and a faint expectant smile curled her lips. Passing her hand under her skirt, she made room for him.

CHAPTER XIV

A CAR, COMING UP THE ROAD, SCARED MOE AND SHORTENED his visit. Before retreating, he got Mary's word that she would not quit without advance notice. She hadn't just been talking through her hat about trying to land a job in a war plant, but it would take time. She had dug her pointed shoe into the grass littered with goat droppings and said she'd had plenty of jobs and wanted something that would last. If she couldn't find what she was looking for in Hartford, she would go back to New York in the fall.

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What impressed Moe was her straight-from-the-shoulder way of talking. The embarrassment, mixed with contempt and suspicion, which he felt in the presence of women, had left him soon after she made room for him on the step beside her. The Millers had hired plenty of girls during their years of dairying and potato and tobacco growing, but there hadn't been one of them who would not have played him for a sucker and made capital out of her spending the night in the car with him. She acted like a girl you could put your money on.

Mary was as good as her word. She was in the field earlier than usual the next day. Anton was laid up, getting over his beating by the Lithuanian. When Moe came up from his chores, he saw Mary, alone in the tobacco, blurred by a mist which lay over the whole valley. She was wearing the wide tan bloomers. There was a brown ribbon around her forehead, like a headbrass, to keep the hair out of her eyes.

She did not notice Moe until he had hoed his way up to her. She said hullo, and then, with a quick glance at the sky, added that the radio had said there would be showers during the afternoon. He nodded and hoed beside her without a word.

The sun spiked its way through the mist. There were flashes like small stones in her red hair.

"Friend of yours, Genghis Kahn, was over bright and early," she said.

He dug his hoe hard. "Hell with such friends!"

She smiled. "You sure got no use for the Genghis." There was something saucy and probing in her eyes. "I should of known better than say that. Anyway, he wants Cooky, ma, and me. He tried to get Anna, but she's going off with

Charley, the fellow that drove in yesterday just when you left. The Genghis says they're ready to start picking, and in the shed they need sewing women. I must be good," she cried gaily. "He offered me a forelady's job."

"Bull!"

She bristled up and stepped into his row. "I don't lie!"

"I ain't said nathin about you lyin. He's a bull-thrower, that Genghis. He's the biggest bull-artist in the country."

She met his sullen gaze firmly. "What would you do if you was offered a better job?"

He was about to fling at her that she had given him her word, but he wanted no favors. "Take it. More money is more money. You don't have to finish the day here."

A bitter smile drew her lips down. "I expected you to say that. You ain't two-faced. You treat a girl the way you treat a man. That's all right with me."

She blocked his way up the row. "I didn't say I was taking the job, Moe. I want something for Cooky. Ma can look out for herself. It's the kid has me worried. If not for him, I wouldn't hang around here another day. The Genghis'll take him even if he ain't old enough to get working papers. Picking on your hands and knees in the shade tobacco ain't for him. Anna was never strong at handling anything except a pair of pants. She used to faint, and she got thinner than a lath by the time picking was over in September. Cooky needs clothes for school. He likes to dress neat. He's got sporting blood in him, the little rat." Her face relaxed, and there was a momentary soft gleam in her gray eyes.

Moe hitched up his shoulders. "Never hired no kids. I ain't no plantation boss to skin the ass off a kid."

"Cooky's crazy about farming. He likes you, and he

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hangs around here more to be with a man who knows a tractor than to be digging worms or swimming in the brook."

For a moment he felt flattered, and then he became suspicious. If she thought she could get round him by soft-soaping him, she had another guess coming. "I ain't got nathin against the kid, but I ain't no plantation boss."

Mary turned abruptly and started hoeing.

Moe felt awkward about refusing Cooky. Cooky wasn't a bad kid, but he, Moe Miller, would get his tobacco in without kids. Besides, if he took the kid, he would have to hire the mother. He'd had his belly full of that Ruby.

The mist lifted. A hot breeze blew from the south, drying the leaves and chafing them. This was the second hoeing. The tobacco was broadening out, the leaves a rich green, thickly gummed, clean except for a few worm-holes. In the early stuff, the spikes had already broken out, crowned with buds.

From the plantations came the sound of tractors, dragging their prout hoes, and the whining of the dusting machines killing the bugs. Among the hills, across the river, thunder boomed.

At noon Moe went down to the cellar to start the pump. When he came up, the family was at the table and Mary was explaining what had happened Saturday night.

Miller chuckled. "Ach, Anton, so it was you who was responsible for Moe's drinking himself to sleep?"

"Sonofagun," cried Anton. "Soon you will say I teach him wenching, too."

All laughed except Mrs. Miller, whose face was averted, and white and frightened.

The old man glanced at her covertly. "Moey, your mother is upset about her hens. Three of them are missing again."

Moe had asked her time and time again to keep them cooped, but they were all over the farm, even in the tobacco. Suddenly he remembered the hen in the grass which had almost caused the accident, throwing Mary off the machine the first day she had worked for him. He looked up, at her burst of laughter, and thought to himself he had been all wrong about this girl.

"I went up to the shack to see if your hired man had stolen the hens," said Mr. Miller. "Remember, Bartasus, when you borrowed a half-dozen hens from us and went into the woods and picked mushrooms with your friend Martin, cooked them with borrowed potatoes, and for three days rolled around with the colic? I was going to call the priest to administer the last rites to you."

Anton guffawed. "The priest would have killed me. What saved me was that with my last strength I took money out of my pocket to pay for those borrowings. It was worse when I drank borrowed Jamaica rum with Dominick Payday. I blatted for seven days and nights like a calf with the knife at his throat. Since then I have borrowed nothing, and I pay all debts."

Seeing that Mrs. Miller still wore the same frightened and forbidding look, the old man stopped his laughter. He said gravely, "Moe, we've got to get those hawks."

"Pa, it ain't the hawks. Didn't I say last week we better keep the hens shut because skunks is around? There's a few worms in the tobacco, and they go huntin for them. If they smell hens been around, they think of chicken dinner."

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Mary smiled appreciatively at his attempt at humor. "Moe is right, Mrs. Miller. Skunks'll do more harm than hawks. Those hawks that hang around here come from the swamp in our pasture, but they ain't the big ones that they say will pick up a hen feeding at your feet. If you——"

Mrs. Miller rose while the girl was talking, and without a word walked into the pantry.

Mary's eyes widened with bewilderment. She turned to the old man for an explanation of this rudeness. He avoided her eyes.

"Why do you stick to the post like a *mazuzah*?" he asked a little sharply when Mrs. Miller returned and stood in the doorway.

"Your jokes!" she snapped.

"Jesting and levity don't lead to lewdness, Esther."

Mary looked from one to the other. She said, "A good shot can get rid of those hawks for you. Frankie could do it. He's my boy friend. I kept company with him in New York when I worked for a Jewish family by the name of Heller. They were jewelers, and Frankie was a silversmith for their firm. Frankie had a good eye; he was champion at *bocce* and pool, and he was a crack shot. Last summer we drove out to the country and stopped at a firemen's carnival. They had a game shooting balloons floating up in the air; and while Frankie was picking them off, a big hawk came over the carnival grounds. He got it with one shot. Frankie brought the hawk home, stuffed it, and gave it to his boss. But then they got into an argument about the war and Mussolini, and Mr. Heller fired him. Frankie was all wet about the war." Her chin thrust out, and she smiled bitterly. "He's in the army now, where all good shots belong."

Moe had listened intently, puzzled by this spiel of hers, the angle she had taken. She hadn't impressed him as being much of a gabber. There was something strained, uneasy in this story. He eyed her narrowly, unable to make head or tail of it.

The girl rose to help with the dishes. Mrs. Miller said, "I can wash them alone!"

Mary sat down reluctantly. "If it's the hawks are bothering you," she said, looking firmly at Mrs. Miller, "and Moe's too busy, I can do as well as Frankie."

"I tell you it's the skunks!" cried Moe, annoyed by this gabbing and the girl's and his mother's fool behavior.

He left them and went into the yard to dig his gas pit. He had bought a gas tank and a pump. He was tired of fooling around with a drum, slopping gas like water. The talk about a gas-curfew because of the war had driven home to him the importance of installing tank and pump immediately.

Mary and Anton walked to the field together, and as they passed him, he threw a quick glance at the girl. Her guard was down; her face showed her hurt. He spat in vexation and started digging his pit.

The breeze died, and the sweat soaked his shirt. Clouds thickened in the sky over the ridge. The thunder, which had sounded muffled all during dinner, became louder and moved from the hills across the river. The sun was wiped out, the shower coming fast and furious. There was plenty of wind, but the rain cleared quickly. The river had split the storm, and they had got only the tail-end of it.

Moe's parents stood on the porch staring at the tobacco,

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which had not been hurt. The broken clouds scooted away toward the west.

"Thank God there was no hail," breathed Mrs. Miller fervently.

The old man put his hand on her soft upper arm. "We ought to call the workers. They must be soaked. Have you dry clothes for the girl, Esther?"

She pulled her arm away and walked into the house.

Moe stared at the old man. "What's she on her ear for now?"

"Son, things are not so easy for your mother. You ought to realize she is suffering because of the war. She remembers how the Germans took the town in which she lived, how her sister disappeared. She worries about you."

"I can take care of myself," Moe said stiffly.

"I know that. Still, she is a mother. All last night she didn't close an eye, imaging all sorts of things." Miller hesitated, flushed for some strange reason, and went on painfully, "A little thing like doing something about her chickens will do her good."

"All right, first chance I get I'll look after them hawks." Again Moe remembered the girl's hurt look and his mother's crazy behavior; if it wasn't one thing, it was another. "You fix those coops. I'll try to get them hawks."

"Well spoken. Now see about your help. The girl must be wet."

There was a clothes closet in Moe's room in which were overalls, rubber aprons, workshoes and boots. Often the hired men picked up in Hartford had to be given clothes and shoes to go out into the field. Moe took overalls and shirts and went to the hoeing field.

The hoers had sought shelter in a thicket during the storm. Anton looked like a drowned mouse. The girl's bloomers stuck to her thighs. She smiled when she saw the huge, hook-nosed lad shamble up with the garments. Sheepishly he explained, "The old man, he don't care if it hails and kills the whole crop. The help mustn't get their tootsies wet."

Mary went into the thicket to change her clothes, and when she came out in the baggy overalls Anton hawhawed.

Moe said heavily, "Bartasus wasn't peekin this time." The words were out before he could halter his tongue. What damned fool thing had led him to hint that he hadn't been peeping at her bathing in the brook?

The smile left her face. Indifferently, she picked up her hoe and went into the field, while Moe returned to his tank pit.

For the next few days he was taken up completely, finishing his pit, mixing concrete, setting up his gas pump. He always plunged into a job up to his ears, and he worked with all faculties concentrated on the business before him. The family kept out of his way, and when Mary started bringing her lunch and eating it in the field he didn't give it a second thought.

He completed the job and found it good. He scraped and washed his tools and brought them into his shop in the shed. About to go back to the tobacco, he saw the shotgun in the corner. He had forgotten about the hawks. He scraped off the rust and oiled the gun; it was the only tool on the farm he neglected.

Sometimes the hawks quartered the fields like dogs, sometimes they lit in the trees in the fencerows. As Moe waited

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for them, his hands still felt the shape of the trowel-handle and his mind still lingered with satisfaction over how he had mastered a reducing bushing in the pump which had caused him no little trouble. The hawks did not appear from their hangout in the swamp.

Shortly after the hoers left the field, Moe took the wagon track. In the woods he caught up with Mary on her way home. She was wearing the tan bloomers that had got wet during the storm. She had left the overalls he had given her, washed and ironed and neatly folded, on his cot last night. Coming in to sleep, he had picked them up to throw them into the closet, when he had become conscious of a faint perfume coming from them, and a sudden ache, sharp as a bone, had got him in his throat.

Mary waited for him. She said, "You carry that gun like a pitchfork."

He took the kidding gravely, without a word.

They stopped under a scrub apple tree on a rise of ground overlooking the swamp. In the swamp were pickerel weeds, reeds, and cattails, like chicory sticks. Above the far side of the swamp sailed one of the hawks. They could barely hear its *keeyou, keeyou*. It came closer. A larger hawk darted toward it from the birch lot. The two met, and then the cock chased after the large hawk, yelling like a crazy jay. They circled and chased each other.

Moe sighted through the branches. At his side Mary said softly, "They look like a happy couple."

The hawks widened their circle. One of them gave up the game and swooped down, almost directly above the tree. Moe let go both barrels with a terrific bang. The

hawk dipped, struggled, and then climbed higher. Joining its mate, it flew away behind the trees in the wood.

Mary laughed.

Moe turned brick-red. "Hell, I was never much of shot."

Still laughing, the girl walked over to a bunch of briers and picked a few blackberries. She held one out for him, but he shook his head. She measured him with a quick glance. "The Genghis wouldn't have missed that hawk."

He bristled up. "Best shootin he can do is with his big yap."

She laughed again. She dropped down on a patch of grass, stretching out her muscular legs. She patted a spot next to her, but he leaned awkwardly on the old blunderbuss, his swarthy face shining with the oil of his great strength.

"Nice, ain't it after the hot?" She sighed happily, lay back, and stared at the sky above the woods, getting her fill of it.

Moe followed her eyes. One long cloud lay slicked out in the west, and above the rim of the trees a star hung as bright as the head of a ten-penny nail. He leaned on his gun and was silent.

Her glance came back to him, hulking beside her. "You boys will have to know how to handle guns before long," she said quietly.

"Tell it to that great blower," Moe spoke out morosely.

"You ain't fair. It's Max is keeping him."

"If he had guts, he'd tell the old man to go to hell."

"Ah, you're the only one with guts around here," she said softly.

"I ain't. I don't have to tell the old man where to get

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off. When the draft papers come he said, 'Moe, if you think you should go, don't look at me because I'm sick.' My mother had a fit when he called up the draft board to tell them. They made him feel better by tellin him it was the farm needed me. But that Genghis, he's got it too goddamn easy to enlist."

Her lips drew down grimly. "That's so." She put her hand to her throat and, running a finger under the edge of her blouse, drew out a chain and a small cross. She fingered the cross, looked silently away, and swallowed hard. Her eyes came back to him, and with a little twist she unhooked the cross.

Moe hesitated as she handed it to him. She said with a teasing smile, "Afraid of a cross?"

He snorted. "Ain't scared of no piece of tin, no matter what shape it's got." He passed a blunt black finger gingerly over the cross.

"That's Frankie's work, the boy I told your folks about. He was a crackerjack silversmith, Frankie Buonopastore." She said the words softly, lovingly. "He could do anything with his hands, a regular Houdini. The old man, his father, is a great locksmith. There wasn't any lock he made Frankie couldn't open." She leaped to her feet. "Frankie the Good Shepherd, that's what the boys on the block called him. He was too good. Oh, well, see you tomorrow, boss."

Clutching the chain and cross, she hurried down the track and disappeared in the high brush of the pasture.

When Moe legged it back into the farmyard, he found his parents and Anton in the Genesareth in the twilight. His father called out that Harry Horton had been by and had

pronounced the pump one of the world's wonders; he had also left a notice for him on the desk. Moe went into his room. Like Max Kahn, Harry had his thumb in every pie; he had brought him a clipping about the Hartford tobacco hearing.

Mrs. Miller stood at the door. "Did you get the hawk?"

"No. If I was you, ma, I'd keep them hens cooped." The talk with the girl had had a strange effect on Moe. He felt more relaxed in his mother's presence than he had felt in a long time. "Look, if you keep them cooped, you won't have to be runnin over the whole farm lookin for eggs."

"It took you so long, and you've come back with nothing!"

"I ain't a shot."

Her breathing was labored. "Tell me. Did you walk her, that Mary, home?"

A suspicion flashed through his mind, but he said in a matter-of-fact voice: "Sure. She was goin down. I met her. We chewed the rag."

His mother's body seemed to grow limp, and her face screwed up as if a nose-twist was being turned on her. Straightening herself up, she left the room.

The reason for his mother's behavior had become clear to Moe. Did she really think he was trying to make the girl? His anger fell as quickly as it had flared. He knew that the hawks could have run off with the flock and he would not have gunned for them if it had not given him the excuse of walking the girl over the wagon track. Slowly the blood rose to Moe's face and thudded there.

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CHAPTER XV

THE OLD MAN ROSE EARLY, AND WITH HAMMER, STAPLES and wire fixed the coop. Then he looked around for help to round up the hens, which were scattered to the four corners of the earth. Waiting until nightfall would do no good because they roosted in tree and bush and on the rafters in the old cowbarn.

Moe was busy soaking tobacco leaves to make black-leaf-forty for a spray against aphides, so the old man went to Anton for help. He found him sitting at the door of the shack, picking at the hair in his nose.

Miller watched him with a smile. "Got a hard goat there?"

"Hell with goat!" Anton cursed. He was in a bad humor; Sundays always weighed heavily on him.

"How can you talk that way, Anton? The goat is the poor man's cow. It is the stepmother of the Jew."

Fatigued by a few hours work, more than he had done in some time, the old man threw off his cares and, sitting in the shade of the shack, spun out the story of the goat and the schoolteacher in a Polish village. A poor man, the teacher lived in one small room with his wife, his children, and his pupils. Driven to desperation by the life in his crowded quarters, the teacher ran to the rabbi, the wise man, for advice. The rabbi listened to the pitiful story and, knowing that he had a goat, said, "Take your goat and bring him into your home." The teacher stared at the rabbi as if he had lost his senses, but after much reflection decided to follow the queer advice. The goat turned over the

soup pot, ate the books, butted the children, climbed over the beds until the teacher tore his hair, and, at his wit's end, rushed back to the rabbi. "Now take the goat out," said the rabbi. Again the teacher followed his advice. The change, the contrast, the comparative peace that followed was so great that the teacher felt himself in a seventh heaven, and life was bliss in his one small room with his scolding wife, his children, and his pupils.

"What a story, Anton! I was a teacher, and I know. This story belongs among the great books of the Old Testament, and it's lesson—man, be satisfied with what you have."

Anton spat. "Only the rich can be satisfied, may the black hours take them."

"What have you got against the rich?" asked Miller, squatting beside the sulking little Pole. Forgotten were the hens.

"Sonofabitch, sonofagun." Anton remembered that his father hated the rich because a landowner had taken his hunting dog from him. Anton remembered that as a child he had been apprenticed to a wealthy baker, a German, a Junker, a *rapooza*.

"The Junkers are not easy to understand," observed Miller sadly. "There was Hindenburg. How we praised him as a great general and a friend of the Jews, but what made him open the gates to that beast Hitler?"

"That Junker, he buried me in work like a turd, the cholera take him! His wife, I could drown her in a spoon of water. I ran away and lived in a barn on dry grain. Winter came and I had no shoes. I went to the market-place, helped the *damen* carry their bags, saved my money, bought a jug, sold water. Where were the rich? I got help

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from the poor, a piece of bread from a Jewish blacksmith, a pair of old *damsky* shoes from a German widow, and Ludwicka the peasant girl took me in."

"The rich are men, like you and me, Anton, with their faults. When I was nine years old, I was sent to a house of learning in a different city. The rich fed me, while the poor lodged me. One day I ate with the cattle dealer, the next day with the linen merchant, the third with the owner of the brickyard. I stayed with the poor, who did not have enough bread to make a blessing over, sleeping on a door covered with rags, hard as a presser's table. When summer came, the rich left for the country. The merchant traveled all the way to Kursk, which Hitler wants, to the woods so full of singing nightingales, and I was left to hunger. Like a child without understanding, I stole some raw potatoes. My conscience tormented me, and I ran away. They found me in a bookstall reading. The little old man who was my father was disgraced. He said I would never become a great man, but would be a peasant. And so life goes, friend Anton, for we are all vessels with little cracks."

Anton took a sheet of newspaper, tore it, made a trumpet, and filled it with tobacco. At his feet the brook tinkled, and in the village church bells clanged. He smoked his cheap tobacco and said, "The rich and the priests, they tend pigs together."

"Not always, not always."

Bitterly and doggedly, Anton repeated, "Always, always. Didn't Ludwicka try to make a priest of me after she had taught me to write? I learned then about priests. In Pennsylvania, when I worked in the mines, wasn't there

a priest who had his snout in all the women? Yes, the rich and the priests are like two dogs behind a fence."

Miller was girding for further argument, but then the iron rail in the yard rang. Fearful of displeasing his wife, he called Anton to throw his legs on his shoulders and come quickly. He showed the way, but Anton lagged behind. Deep in his heart the old man did not blame him; the very air around the table was charged these days.

After dinner, depressed, Miller returned to the shack; his bird had flown. He went indoors and braced himself before the radio. "Ah, all the English do is bomb cities. Can a war be won that way? I am afraid they are bombing with bales of hay. English lion, English lion, when will you show your might?"

In the kitchen, his wife was busy. She was in one of those moods in which she looked like Judith ready to have his head if he so much as offered to raise a finger to help her. It was then that she was most desirable and queenly.

The blue Packard rolled into the yard. Miller hurried to greet Rose. She had brought Sunday papers, a book, and her arms were full of flowers. Blessings on this Jewish daughter who never came with empty hands.

"Uncle Israel, please talk to papa again," she begged breathlessly as she arranged the flowers in a vase. "Dominick got drunk, beat up his wife and the lame Francis, and yesterday he pulled out the ramblers and the yellow rose-bush that won a prize. Papa curses him terribly, but he keeps him. If we could only get decent help."

"It's those *goyim*, those Polacks," cried Mrs. Miller venomously. "A bottle of brandy isn't enough for that Anton. Give him a barrel to bathe in."

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"I saw your Anton down the road, Esther. He was singing and crossing himself."

"Get Moey!" cried Mrs. Miller, turning white and forgetting she had just cursed the man. "Anton is going to the picnic. Last week one of those drunkards was run over by a car near the picnic grounds."

Moe was pulling into the driveway in his sprayer. Covered with black-leaf-forty, he barely nodded to Rose and listened to the old man's plea with a lowered head. He gulped down his meal and left in his car.

Mrs. Miller had not spoken to him since she had walked out of his room. She said, "Israel, are you letting him go to the picnic without washing?"

"Am I his wet nurse, wife?" He laughed at the pun. "And if I had said to him that even an ordinary Mohammedan has a sense of order and cleanliness, it would mean little. When I was a soldier, serving God and the Czar Nicholas, stationed in Tiflis, I became friends with Mohammedans, also serving the great Czar. One was dying, and his last thoughts were to see he was clean, his rump was washed."

Mrs. Miller stamped her little foot. "I've told you once not to talk that way. Am I a gentile whore?" Turning on her heel, her nostrils quivering, she rapped out, "Come, Rose!"

Rose followed her in confusion, but before she stepped out of the room she looked back at the old man with her soft bulging eyes and gave him an understanding smile.

The old man sighed. "Sometimes I do talk like an old fishwoman and don't know when to stop. But a man must do something. Ah, life, life, 'we eat our days and swallow

our tears, destroy our Here praying and laboring for the Hereafter.' " He went into the yard and, remembering the hens, hurried into the fields calling them.

In the meantime Moe was speeding through the country, looking to the right and looking to the left, hoping to find Anton somewhere in a field or ditch. The car pulled up to the picnic grounds without his having seen his man.

The picnic grounds were on the outskirts of the village. Over the gravel road, running along one side of the grounds, a haze of dust was scattered. There was a game on the baseball field, and in the pitcher's box Hy Kahn was twirling, the whole outfield drawn in and his infield clustered around him.

Not interested in baseball, particularly the exploits of the gallant Genghis, Moe left his car on the state road and made his way over the gravel, having spotted Anton stamping the ground in a Cossack's dance among a bunch of cronies. His shoulders hunched up, his face pale as boiled cabbage, he hopped around in his tugboat shoes. Dominick was his partner, and Martin the pheasant man, blind in one eye, which he had lost in a mine explosion, was beating time.

Anton stopped capering, let out a squawk, and ran toward Moe. "Alleluia, my *sokol*, my *druh*."

Moe pushed him off, embarrassed. "Look here, Tony. Look. Tomorrow is work."

Anton backed away and slyly wagged a finger. "You are getting me home when pears grow on the willow tree."

Moe bit his blackened lips and, looking around for the refreshment stand, wondered whether he couldn't induce Anton to come along after a couple of beers. Just then a

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hand clapped him on the back. He turned. It was Harry Horton with Lou Callahan, the dairyman and tobacco grower, whose testimony at the Hartford hearing had appeared in all the newspapers.

Harry pulled a long face. "Here's a man always at it, Lou. Can't go out to have a good time but he's got to take his overalls along."

A puggy, merry-eyed Irishman with a round face and brown ball-like hands, Callahan smiled. "We coulda used him and his overalls in Hartford the other day."

"It was a good show," said Harry, who often went off for the day and left his wife to run his business. "Packed full, but there's no barn packed so tight you can't thresh another sheaf in its door. Yessir, and how are the folks, Moe? Israel don't look so good these days."

Moe grunted noncommittally.

They stood in a grove of maples, away from the rest of the picnickers, between the dance hall and the beer stand, listening to Callahan.

Lou Callahan was born in Windsor, which grows more shade tobacco than any other town in the world. Outspoken and independent, he had been in and out of farming numerous times. About ten years ago, during the worse days of the depression, he had been invited, over the opposition of Kahn, to appear at the synagogue to talk about a new organization which was holding a farm relief conference in Washington. He had made *kiddish* after the services, taking his whiskey without a wink, and, standing before the congregation jingling a watchchain which looked like a small rockchain, he had harangued the farmers half in English and half in Yiddish, which he had picked up

working as a teamster in Boston. Because he had a reputation as a drinker and horseman, some of the Jews had hesitated. Others were influenced by Kahn, and there were a number who would have nothing to do with the organization after their unhappy experiences with the tobacco association. In the ensuing years, in spite of his heavy drinking, Callahan had stuck to his guns, fought the plantation owners and the buyers, who had finally ruined him. Now he was back again on a small farm near his beloved Windsor, and while a son-in-law ran it, he rammed around the country raising hell.

The rosy-cheeked, round, hearty Irishman, who presented such a strange contrast to wiry, long-nosed, long-faced Harry, took both men by the arm and led them, in spite of Moe's protests, to the beer counter.

"Who's your buyer?" he asked Moe.

"Kahn."

Lou wrinkled his round, veiny nose.

"That speaks volumes," chuckled Harry.

"Max was the big gun of the plantation interests at the hearing. He swore on a stack of Bibles that conditions on the plantations were improvin by the minute. Why, when his son went huntin and campin, he put up in worse shacks than any the plantations used for their help."

Harry nodded. "Maxie is the hard nut to crack. He's even tougher than that brother of his. That time Hy's truck run over the kid, Hy was for giving himself up, but Maxie threatened to disown him if he didn't lay low until the thing blew over."

Moe shuffled his feet. "Got to be going. Got some black-leaf-forty soakin."

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"Look, Miller," said Callahan, "you was a young cock just shootin the red when I seen you last. Wanted to take you to Washington, but your mother wouldn't hear of it. Now all we want is to have you come down and meet with us once in a while just to talk things over. You can't tell what'll happen with prices. Only time there was juice in the market was in 1939, when the F.B.I. was up here. Washington wants us farmers to git together. There's a war on, and Max'll pull the strings and not give you the price."

"He'll come across!"

Callahan showed his broad short teeth in a wide grin. "Here's hopin for your sake. I'll drop in some day when you got the time."

Moe knew how his father would enjoy this visit, and he remembered how earnestly this little half-cocked Irishman had worked to organize the farmers, and though he had no use for some of Callahan's ideas, he said, "I'm kinda busy, but I won't show you the gate."

"That's the boy," laughed Callahan and, shoving his warm, ball-like fist into Moe's paw, he departed with Harry.

Moe found himself alone in the crowd. The air was hot with the smell of roasting frankfurters, gas, dust, and beer. Boys in army uniforms were hanging on to the side of the dance hall from which came the crash of a band. Down in the hollow near the lily pond, drunks were singing and a couple of men were dancing a *Cossatzky*. It was Anton's gang.

Anton scrambled up from the hollow and clutched Moe by the arm. "*Vivat*, my young master! Come drink. Come.

When you're with crows, you croak like a crow." He tried to pull Moe down into the hollow.

A roar from the baseball field. The Iron Dukes were coming in from their victory, led by Hy, who acknowledged the applause by languidly lifting his baseball hat and raising his hand, calling "Hi" as if he were announcing himself. "Look, by God," he bawled and clutched at his heart. "Look, if it ain't Moo Miller! See you later, sour-puss."

With the crowd gaping at him, Hy ordered the players of both teams to the beer stand and blew them to drinks, and then he sauntered to the dance hall, bowing left and right. With an air of being bored to death, he took the accordion player's place, ran over the keys of the instrument, and burst into the strains of a Polish hop.

Giving up hope of getting Anton home, Moe escaped from the hollow. As he passed the dance hall, a girl called to him. It was Mary, dancing with long-legged String Petraitis. "Buy a dance with me, Mr. Miller," she cried.

The blood battled against Moe's temples. He hurried his steps.

"Moe Miller!" She left her partner and caught up with him. "I won't eat you up," she whispered. The wraps were off her; her face was loose and warm and red as if she had been drinking and dancing too much, and in her eyes there was the brass which had made her mother so attractive to the country sports.

"Watch this," she cried, putting her arm through his, as the bass drum boomed in the dance hall.

Hy leaped to the floor from the musician's platform. He drew a roll of greenbacks from his pocket and cried he

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would give one hundred smackers to anyone who could raise a sack of potatoes with his teeth. Two men lugged in a sack. A soldier accepted the challenge, broke a tooth, and spat blood. Another of the strong boys tried it, but could barely budge the sack. Then Hy bent over, and bracing himself firmly, sank his teeth into the sack and lifted it clear above the floor. To the burst of applause, he counted out the money and paid himself.

Mary strained up on her toes. Her body pressed against Moe, and the faint fragrance, which had got him before, choked up his throat. "Here's your chance to show up the Genghis," she said huskily. "Come."

He pulled back. "I take my potatoes without no sack."

She laughed. "You got to get back to work?"

"Sure. Anton skedaddled. The old man took a fit worryin he'd get drunk and get bumped off. I had to come to rope him."

"We'll keep an eye on him and bring him back with us. Charley is here with Anna. He's got his car." Mary eyed him gravely as he edged away from her. "I got a t.l. for you. From String. He was saying to me, 'There's a fella you can't go wrong on, honey. A working fool. Nobody can farm like him, and he'll make some girl a good man.'"

Moe scowled fiercely. "He slings the bull, too." He swung around and fled from her.

People tried to stop him to talk. Everyone in the village knew the big-beamed, somber-faced lad. He answered curtly and shouldered his way through the crowd, the sweat pouring down his burning face. He had broken into the clear when he felt something warm in his back pocket.

He clapped his hand to it, dug it out quickly. It was a lighted cigarette.

"Hot tail!" roared Hy, who had sneaked behind him to give him the hot seat and was retreating in feigned terror back to the dance hall.

Moe strode across the meadow to his car. Someone was calling him, but he paid no attention. As he pounded down on the starter, he heard Anton's wild screeching. He waited in a savage frame of mind.

Anton clambered into the car. "Those Foley women! Lizards, *cackos!* They talk and talk, the mother and the red one. I must go home and listen to my master."

The car roared away, snapping Anton's head back. He sat up and beat one hand against the other. "We're *smyruses*, Moey. Sunday we have fun. Drink and go into the woods to foolish with the women. You, when you are with goats, you leap with goats. The teacher and the rabbi and Old Testament say it."

CHAPTER XVI

THE TOBACCO WAS GROWING FAST. THE SPIKES WERE LOADED with buds. Soon the buds would break into blossom. It was time for budding.

Moe and his help started on that job one misty morning on the ridge. The heavy dew weighed the stately plants down. Spider webs like tent cloth were pitched on the damp ground between the leaves. The dew soaked the workers, but the buds nipped off crisply and cleanly.

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Each worker took a couple of rows. Anton, showing the effects of his Sunday drunk, started feebly enough, but when he saw Moe and Mary beating him, he put on speed recklessly.

Moe exchanged glances with Mary. "He'll end up like old man Petraitis, get drunk, and they'll find his bones in Beelzebub Woods, picked by a fox or skunk."

"He give me his word he'll lay off till after cutting time."

"His word don't mean nathin. Time he went cultivatin, he ridged too much, and that won't do the plants no good. When we're cuttin and handin, them ridges'll be in the way. They make humps like in some cemetery."

They were moving side by side, a good team, breaking off the buds and letting them drop at their feet, but every few minutes Moe had to step into Anton's row to brush off the buds the Pole was dropping on the leaves.

"When he's sober," said Mary, "he can work. I remember him picking potatoes for us. He could pick!"

"You ain't seen pickers. No Polack or Lith can pick like one of them Canucks. Coupla years ago Max Kahn hired me to get some hay up north. He was keepin steers, fattened them, and used their manure on his tobacco ground. I was through Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and I had a chance to see them French Canucks pick potatoes."

The girl nodded, her eyes on her work, not missing a bud or letting one crash down to injure a leaf, and not a squawk about the gum blackening her hands. Moe had heard her laugh, ringing out above all the others, when the trick had been played on him at the picnic. In spite of that and his deep-rooted suspicions, he felt strangely at ease with her; words didn't have to be jimmied out of him.

He watched her nimble hands. "You ain't forgot tobacco."

"No," she murmured, a shadow darkening her face.

Anton went into the woods, and when he got back they had caught up with him.

"You don't have to rush your guts out, New Testament," Moe said. "Take it easy. Don't bud them in the pants, the leaves. You go fishin between them small leaves for the buds."

Anton's baggy, bristly little chin fluttered. Before he could open up, Moe caught the girl's warning glance. He soothed him. "Here, Tony, we got to leave some plants for seed. How about them ahead? You know tobacco."

Pacified by this praise, Anton narrowed his eyes to slits and chose the seed plants, and then he outstripped the pair again.

They had budded a sizable chunk of the field when the mill whistles began hooting along the river and, as they walked together towards the yard, Mary, who was silent and taken up with something, stopped suddenly. "I wanted to talk to you yesterday, but you had enough on your mind, with the good Tony. I'm taking the afternoon off."

Moe shrugged his shoulders.

"I got to get to Hartford. Anna says I can get a job in the aircraft. I told you first chance I'd get out, and I ain't playing you dirt, Moey."

"I heard you," he said coldly.

She brought the knuckles of her hand to her dry lips. For the first time he saw a freckle the size of a buckwheat seed at the corner of her lips. "If you ain't using your car, I'd like to borrow it. I'll pay for the gas and oil."

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"I ain't in no taxi business, you got to pay me."

She was standing in front of him on the narrow path along the edge of the field. "I got to make it somehow. Oh, I can drive. My Good Shepherd—" There was a hard curl to her lips as she broke off. "We had a car together, a little Willys. I sold it when he was drafted and we broke up."

Moe looked her full in the face. She wasn't happy about asking him. He drew his sleeve across his hot face. "You can have it. I don't need it until tonight."

She said gratefully, "I'll be back by six."

Moe backed the Dodge out of the shed, filled the tank at his new pump, checked the oil. "She steers hard. The bushins is wore. I ain't had time to look after them."

"I'll manage."

Through the screen door came Mrs. Miller's imperious voice. "Moe, are you coming in for dinner today?"

Mary leaped into the seat and drove away, handling the car like a man.

Miller came out on the porch. "Why didn't you ask her to stay to eat, son? Must she ride home for her dinner now?"

"Took the afternoon off. She's lookin for another job."

The old man shoved his spectacles up on his forehead and stared unhappily at Moe. Spreading his hands out, he went back into the house.

This time Mary did not keep her word; she was not back by six. Moe's ears strained for the sound of the car as he worked in the yard after budding that evening on a tobacco rigging for his truck. Above his sawing he could hear the twanging of Anton in his shack; Mrs. Miller, after hearing

the news about Mary, had given the little Pole an extra allowance of prune brandy. A cock pheasant whistled in the pine woods, and the old man, out for his evening walk, stopped to watch the carpentry.

He kept his peace for a few moments, pulling at his mustache, but presently he said: "We'll miss that girl. She's a *Panna Matka*, a Blessed One, and she means nothing but good."

The saw ripped the wood; the dust flew in a steady stream into the warm air. Moe said nothing.

The old man tugged at the mustache, which he had once compared to horsehair in an old sofa. "Again there is the question of help." He tried to inject some humor into the situation. "I may have to tell that old corpse whom your mother calls the best doctor in the world to go to the monks. Blumenthal may allow me to work. Ah, but why couldn't the *Panna Matka* wait until after cutting time?"

"Why the hell should she? She don't owe me nathin."

The old man looked at Moe strangely and walked off, shoulders stooped, hands locked behind him.

Moe stared at his bent back, turned to see his mother watching him intently from the window, and, dropping his tools with a clatter, he set out cross lots. He turned into the wagon track, and in a few minutes was in the pasture back of the Foley barn.

On the bank between the road and house, Cooky and young Harry Horton were standing stiffly at attention before a flag stuck into the ground. Cooky raised what looked like an old coffee pot and sounded retreat through it while the other boy saluted. The billy goat trotted up to join the

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ceremonies. Cooky took the flag down, while Harry, a big hippy boy, built like his mother, threw himself on the goat.

Forgetting his business, Moe felt an unusual impulse to take it easy and loaf with the kids. He had never played as a boy, his mother keeping him from the Polish children in the neighborhood, and his only buddy, as far back as he could remember, had been work, for the old man was on the road day and night in his buggy, peddling to earn a few dollars to keep the farm from falling into the hands of his creditors.

Cooky spotted him, leaning on the fence, watching them somberly. "Hey, big stuff, come on across. Nobody'll bite you."

With a morose grin, Moe kicked the gate and crossed.

"Sis ain't home yet. The old woman knows when she'll be back. Go on in and ask her."

Moe glanced uneasily at the house.

"Hey, Moey, I'll bet your boots you can't hold this goat. The Genghis tried it, but he threw his game knee out of joint."

"Spouse, spouse, he try it," said Harry, who stuttered.

"Spouse your ass is higher than your nose," cried Cooky. "Go on, Moey, old horsebuck." He slapped Moe's biceps in a patronizing way, and whistled to the goat.

At the signal the goat backed and rushed Moe, staggering him. Moe grabbed the goat by the horns and pushed him away. He stepped to one side, ruefully rubbing his shins. The goat rushed him again. This time Moe caught him with a grunt, twisted his neck, heaved him high above his head, kicking and blating, and then dropped him on the ground.

The goat lay stunned. The boys squatted around it, and Cooky gave it the count. Before he could reach "ten," the goat was up and at Moe. "Technical knockout," cried Cooky. "You lose, you big bum."

Young Harry showed his buck teeth and praised the exhibition of strength.

Moe said modestly, "If I could throw a three-year bull that way, it'd be somethin to blow about, fellas."

Nevertheless, Cooky clapped him on the shoulder. "You pass. Now I can tell Mary I don't mind havin you in the family."

Dryly Moe said "Yeh" and then, feeling the blood firing his face, he turned away.

The boys chased the goat into a shed and locked it up. "Goat to Stud" was written above the door. Near the shed was a backhouse with a sign, "Built in 1800."

Cooky explained. "Some of the fellas used to come around before Sis shacked them away. They was up to all kinds of monkeyshines."

A radio blared in the house.

"That's the old gal," said Cooky, fixing his bright green eyes on Moe. "Go over, big stuff, and say somethin to her. She can chew the ear off a pot, but go on." Cooky gave him a push. "Maw, Moe Miller's here."

Mrs. Foley came out on the steps. When she saw Moe, she gave a start. She pulled her dress down and smiled ingratiatingly. Cooky butted at him from behind. Moe threw a menacing glance at him, and Mrs. Foley called out, "Ain't no harm in comin in; Mary'll be back soon." In confusion, the sweat breaking out over his body, he shuffled after her

through the disorderly kitchen. She lit a lamp and hurried out, excusing herself for being so sloppy.

Moe sat on the edge of a chair, riding his hat on his knee. A crucifix, shaped like a monkey wrench, was in a red vase on the mantelpiece, with some pheasant feathers. On the wall hung a painting of Eve and the serpent, thick as a man's thigh, and various religious pictures, including *Panna Matka*, the Holy Mother. In a corner, on a small piano, stood two framed photographs of Mary, one taken in her Communion dress, the other showing her with a slim, dark-skinned, good-looking lad.

Mrs. Foley came into the room in a fresh dress. She whipped a comb through her black coarse hair and inquired after his folks, putting it on thick what grand people they were. The sooty blue eyes with plenty of brass in them had not changed, but the rest of the body, which had caused so much trouble that fall among Miller's potato pickers, was showing signs of age. The legs were purplish and swollen. The hips had spread out under pounding; everything seemed to have been drawn down to the great useful middle, so that the strings and cords stood out in her neck and arms.

She sat down with a broad dazzling smile, dropping the comb into the deep trough of her lap. "Ain't had the weather we should."

Awkwardly Moe brushed the sawdust off his knee. "Weather ain't been bad," he mumbled.

"Well, yes, but there was a little too much rain. Some say the war's responsible. So much shootin goin on, it makes for clouds and rain."

Moe glanced at her sharply from under his heavy lids.

She went on: "Young Kahn, when he was here lookin for shed hands, said there was too much rain, but it ought to be good pickin. He wanted me and the kids workin in the shade for him. But even if bundles was payin good, I'd ruther work the field, the open. I told him I could pick up work up the road a ways. Even Moe Miller might take me on."

She bunched her lips, shot an innocent look at his sweating face, while her broad, meaty hands fiddled with the comb in her lap.

"I don't like hirin out to them plantations. I see in the papers that that hearin dug up a lot about them. Some is old stuff, where they got boogies, niggers, workin; sleepin them in coops, and bed sheets ain't changed all season, so they look like a blacksmith's apron. Other places, where they been cuttin their hair, they find it one foot deep. Now Kahn's ain't so bad, but that Dominick Payday, he can't keep his hands off the ladies, and when a woman come in one day, he start yellin, 'Got enough c's around.' You know what I mean. It turned out this lady was a labor investigator."

Undeterred by Moe's grim silence, she ran on. "Did you read about John Webster?" Mrs. Foley got up and gave him the paper with a great show of deference. "He died last week. I remember him when he druv into the yard in an old buckboard. He was stickin out of his clothes. He wanted Stevey to go into shares with him. Stevey couldn't see it. Webster become about the biggest plantation owner this side of the river."

Webster was a Yankee who had perverted the tobacco association to his own profit, had won land from small

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farmers in card games, and had more use for rye as whiskey than as a cover crop. The paper's headline read: "We'll Miss Him."

"Yeh," said Moe, "and the bottle'll miss him."

"By gosh, if it won't," agreed Mrs. Foley cheerfully. "Webster sure help everybody in that line. They say he got his start in prohibition days, keepin a still. Most everybody had a kettle then, and was drinkin hot stuff. There was Stevey's father. He was in it, too, even if he was strict and was more in church than out. Stevey wouldn't touch but a drop until tobacco got him down. The old man used to be hard on him when he was a kid, beat the heck out of him for makin the little birch brooms for them baths the Polacks use. After he lost his crop by hail, Stevey was talkin of goin back to them. Anything to raise some cash. Tobacco is hard stuff."

"Only kind of hard stuff I like," muttered Moe.

She stared at him, got the point, and gave her brassy laugh. "You're darn right it's hard stuff. Mary knows that. Why, one year we had seed in apple dirt, and the seed wouldn't break. I put it in a wet sock, got the white eye with corn starch. Wood ashes didn't do no good. For a coupla weeks it looked like we'd never have a crop. It was awful. But then the seed come out good, we planted, and the tobacco had short stems and leaves so big you could wrap one round yourself. So I been tellin Mary there ain't no tobacco can't be handled, same as there ain't no man can't be handled."

Moe wondered how much longer she would go on. He was hot and red. As he was casting about to escape, he heard the Dodge. He could tell its engine a mile off. Mrs. Foley

scurried out. The car door slammed and Mary snapped, "I know I'm late."

She met Moe on the steps. "I'm sorry I kept you." Her voice was dull and tired. She gave the bag she was carrying to her mother. "Jesus, I'm tired."

Mrs. Foley brought a bottle out to the steps. "I shoulda asked you before, Moe. This is good Irish whiskey. It's been a dry kind of day."

He shook his head and walked down the bank. Mary accompanied him to the car. "I could of come earlier, but there was a long line outside the office. What a runaround!"

Moe saw her drooping shoulders and weary face. Something compelled him to say there were plenty of jobs in the factories. "They been after me to leave the farm and start in a factory."

She closed the car door for him as he got in. "They'd take you any day. But a girl, without experience, that's different." She drew a deep breath and straightened out with a smile. "Oh, I'll find something."

The starter whirled. He put his hand to the gearshift. "I didn't fill your tank, Moe."

He eyed the gauge. "That don't worry me."

"You stop at Harry's and let him fill your tank."

"Forget it," he said gruffly.

"Moe, I——"

"I said forget it!"

"What a bullheaded guy you are." She stepped on the running board. "Thanks a lot." She put her hands on his shoulder and, bending, kissed him lightly. She leaped down and walked back to the house.

Moe banged his foot twice on the starter before he

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realized the engine was going. All the way back to the farm he felt her warm lips on his face.

CHAPTER XVII

THE KISS SEEMED TO HAVE MADE NO DIFFERENCE TO MARY. She greeted Moe coldly when she came to work. Her face showed lines of worry, her chin was set. She worked apart from the others, budding. Only at quitting time did a change come over her. She paused to talk to Moe as he brought up his mare and his fertilizer spreader.

"What are you doing tonight?" she asked.

"Nathin much." He pulled his eyes away from her and shifted his bulging tobacco cud to the other cheek.

Her mouth smiled faintly. "That means you ain't working the whole night through."

"Just a coupla hours. This field is slowin up on me. It's hardpan, and I got to force it a little. Don't like the color of the plants."

"If you get through early, and you ain't got nothing else to do, you might come down to the hawk's place. I like to get off by myself after work, smoke a cigarette, and moon. Makes you feel sometimes like being in a confession booth, but you like it."

She fixed the apron around the fertilizer wheelbarrow and threw a searching glance at Moe. "There ain't no kneeling, and you don't have to get pawed." She moved off with a laugh, and then, as if she had forgotten her in-

vation, cried in the tone which always was touched with mockery, "So long until next time, boss."

Moe couldn't make her out. Another girl after a kiss would have thrown herself into his arms, but she had been like stone. Maybe he had never understood those Foleys. Steve had been all right. Take her mother: though he had chased her off the farm once, branding her a whore, she hadn't done anything out of the way yesterday, just gabbed like an old duck and invited him to have a drink. And Mary surely knew how to put her in her place. As for Mary's invitation, he didn't intend to make a jackass of himself under that apple tree again.

Mary did not repeat the invitation. Instead of showing disappointment at his failure to show up, she was strangely cheerful, kidding Anton mercilessly all during the budding. At noon she walked with the men to the house to speak to Mrs. Miller about the cleaning, and when she heard that Mrs. Petraitis had been hired, she answered, "String's mother needs it more than me."

She saw the shame in the old man's eyes as he apologized, explaining it really was too hard for a woman to work the fields and scrub floors. She tried to make it easier for him. "I was going to give it up anyway. I was eleven years old when I was farmed out, and I been scrubbing floors ever since. Now, when I'm looking for a job in a factory, I find I don't know anything but scrubbing. That's what gets me. The girls are getting wise to themselves. They ain't going back to the house, they're going to the factory."

"And to the farm, my *Panna Matka*," said the old man quietly.

Mrs. Miller began calling him for dinner.

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He took his time. "And to the farm," he repeated.

Mrs. Miller called in a voice which would brook no delay.

The return of the girl had upset her. Moe guessed she was nagging the old man, moving heaven and earth to have him do something about it. He didn't realize how deeply she felt about the matter until he came down later to get a pail of water from the tap at the side of the house. He was startled to hear her sobbing on the porch where, screened by the lilacs, barberry bushes, and trumpet vines, his parents often took their afternoon naps together.

"All my life, Israel, I feared it. Israel, our son will fall into their hands."

"Shah, how you talk!"

"Why do you hush me? I would have spoken to him, but every time I speak you cry I drive the boy away from us. You're like a bone and a thorn."

"Control yourself. He is not falling into anybody's hands. You should know your own son by this time."

"It is you do not know your son."

For a moment there was silence, and then there was the sound of a kiss.

"Esther, one of our great men said that he who is walking by the road and studying and breaks off his duty to say, 'How fine is that tree. How fine is that field,' the Scriptures regard as if he had forfeited his life. Often have I broken off my study to look at a tree and a field. Only over you have I lost my life. Since I took you as a girl of fifteen, the youth like honey on your lips—"

"Let me be, Iser!"

"How can I when your hair is like a flock of goats, your

teeth white like ewes all shaped alike, and this is like a heap of wheat?"

"Please, some one will see us!"

"Cannot a man sport with his wife? Let the world look. It is a sight for kings."

The woman panted. "What has come over you today?"

"I want to be like the Cossack Taras Bulba. Remember I read you the story when you were sick. Long have I wanted two sons who could wrestle their father and throw him down. Another one like Moe so that he can see himself and change a little. Built like a Russian bear. Oh, my wife, I have promised the Lord, I have promised."

"You are crazy. You!" Her voice was choked off, and then she gave a resigned sigh.

Moe gripped the pail, and, lifting his feet, fearing to disturb his father, he moved away. The water slopped from the pail and wet his legs.

And again at quitting time Mary lingered to talk. She did not say a word about the hawk's place. When she left him to his cultivating, he lost his temper and bawled hell out of the mare. Unaccustomed to this behavior, the old girl became rattled and stepped on a plant.

Moe finished forcing his last field early next day, and then he completed his tobacco rigging. He had the whole evening for other work. Instead, he prowled about restlessly, putting his hand to this, to that. He went to the shed where he rolled himself a couple of cigars from a heap of sweated scraps, and then forced himself to the decision. Without changing his clothes, to make it as casual as possible, smelling of mare and dust and tobacco gum, he strolled over the fields and up the cool track.

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Under the apple tree he saw no one. He halted, disappointed, and was about to turn back, when laughter broke from a bunch of wild rye near the fence. Mary sat up in her ambush. She smiled triumphantly. "Mister, how did you get here?"

"Used my feet," he muttered morosely.

She made room for him beside her, but he sat down at a distance from her. He chucked away the butt which he had chewed to a rag and took out the other cigar.

Mary was barefooted. She was wearing faded blue dungarees and a shirt which was half unbuttoned. She offered him a cigarette from a crushed pack. "It's a better smoke than your rope."

He snorted, licked the wrapper and stroked the brown sweet outer leaf into place. He lit his cigar, puffed hard, and watched the slow burn and the gray cap of ash which denoted good leaf, and when he picked up his eyes she was studying him.

Her lips drew down. "You big clodhopper, you wouldn't know which end of a cigarette to start on."

His first impulse was to take her literally. Her mixture of seriousness and mockery confused him; when she snapped out of her serious moods and became lively, he found her a little too fast for him.

As she busied herself with her cigarette, his eyes wandered over the broad figure in the clean trousers and shirt. Her ankles were brown and strong, her feet broad. The hands cupped around the flame showed nicotine stains.

Moe butted with his head. "Havin trouble gettin the gum off?"

"Some," she admitted. Her shirt was tight around her

chest, and as she leaned against the tree, the white of her belly showed.

Moe looked away, his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth.

Critically, she examined her broad hands. "I ain't going to be budding tobacco all my life. I'll get the stain off soon enough."

He glanced quickly at her from under his burned eyelids. Smoke curled from his nostrils, and the sweet strong cloud hung over him in the still air.

"You're like the rest of the men. You want your women to be sweet little loafing honeys, dumb Doras, always dolled up, ready at the snap of your fingers."

"I got no goddamn use for a drone!"

"Excuse me, please, Moey, if I ain't got you right." She gave a submissive teasing bow. Quizzically she eyed the swarthy face and the big head with the coal-black, curly hair and the neck set like a post in his chest. She threw her cigarette away, hummed under her breath, and then mischievously dug her toe into his leg.

He had been absorbed in contemplating his cigar, and he started.

"I'm sorry," she murmured with a straight face. She sighed deeply. "Mr. Miller, I'm afraid I'm in Dutch with your mother."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"But I like her."

"You're crazy," he said severely.

"I do. Honest, I like her. You don't know what a bitching mother is. There's mine. There's Frankie's, Mrs. Buonopastore. We were good friends until the priest stepped in,

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and then she wanted Frankie to marry an Italian girl, a Catholic. She couldn't get it into her head I'm Catholic. She wanted me to take everything the priest said as holy, and to swear I would go to Mass every morning. I go to Mass when I can. I put money into the poor box. But Frankie was a softie. Everything his mother and the priest said was all right. If they were against girls smoking, girls shouldn't smoke. He just couldn't think for himself; he was that soft." The pain was in her eyes, and then they cleared, and a smile of relief and amusement swept over her face as she took in the huge, blobber-lipped boy beside her.

"I liked Frankie," she went on. "Oh, hell, maybe if he'd smoked broadleaf, he'd been more of a man."

"Maybe," said Moe gravely.

Her eyes were on him. "You think so?"

"Never met the fella. City fellas don't take to strong tobacco. They look at a broadleaf cigar, and it looks like somethin got poked in a ditch. They're out for the looks."

"Looks don't mean nothing to you."

"No," he said firmly.

"Jesus be praised."

He disregarded her teasing to attend to his cigar.

She edged toward him. Her eyes were large and stern. She cried, "Frankie was putty, but you're an iceberg. You could freeze a girl to death."

Her face was close to his. The blood boomed in his ears, and there was a band around his chest.

"Maybe this is in your way." She fingered the cross.

"There ain't nathin in my way."

She bent back, offended. "Nothing?"

"Nathin, except this fella here."

She tossed her head back and laughed until the tears stood in her eyes and the rosy blood was in her cheeks. "Jesus, Moey," she cried, "if he's in your way, why don't you do something about him?"

She waited, and then impatiently she snatched the cigar from him and threw it into the rye. He frowned. She seized his hand, and instinctively he tried to pull away. He touched her breasts.

Moe's hesitation vanished. He caught her to him, bringing his face hard against hers. He found her mouth. It was firm and cool and sweet. Her breath came in short gasps, and suddenly her lips loosened like a snapped string. She slipped and lay back against him with a shudder.

Fearing that he had hurt her and she had fainted, Moe stared at her in consternation. His arms dropped.

She stirred. A smile flickered over her face. She was peering up at him through drowsy, half-shut eyes. She put her hand against his chest, wavered, and then taking a deep, firm breath, she said huskily, "You can—no, not that, please!" She pushed away from him as he moved like a bear upon her.

"You can put your arms around me," she whispered.

Setting his teeth, Moe allowed her to show him how. He put his arm clumsily and roughly around her shoulders. She leaned against him with a sigh, took his big, black hand and imprisoned it in both of hers. Thus they sat in the dusk.

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE TOBACCO WAS TALLER THAN MAX KAHN; THE GREAT leaves buried him, stretching to the edge of the sky like a green sea. "Moey, you got something nice here," he cried, his face cracking into a smile.

Moe grunted.

His legs wide apart, swollen like a cut hog, Max waddled heavily. He had never taken time off to have his hemorrhoids removed, never ate a meal quietly, and, always on the go, he suffered greatly.

On his way through the field, finding several tobacco bugs, he tore off their heads. "Plenty of them, hey, Moishe?"

"Yeh." Moe bent down to look underneath a handsome leaf which had been riddled to the rib. "Here's one big as a hot dog with them white eggs on it."

"We don't have them in our shade, the devils."

Moe nodded grudgingly. "We can do without them, by cripes!"

"Without buyers, too, looks like. You used to come to see me once in a while last summer. Now you will even stop off to talk to a Callahan, but not your friend and an old lanstman."

Moe went ahead between the plants, arms up as if he were treading water.

"Still angry because I tried to hire that drunken Polack? Ach!" Max groaned, "where are you running? This cursed affliction! So Callahan has become a good friend of yours?"

"That's my business!"

No sooner had the words left his mouth than Max regretted jumping the boy. This was a stubborn bullock, and he had to be handled carefully. For once in his life, Max was interested more in the man than in his crop. He knew what was going on at the Millers'. "Hey," he said, twisting his lipless mouth into a cordial smile, "you don't know how much like your father you are—like two drops of water you are. Once he hated buyers like pig, would have given his whole inheritance to drive them from his yard. When a clove of garlic like this Callahan came around, he invited him into the synagogue to start trouble. It took him years to learn you cannot live without the buyer. You'll learn, too."

Moe squinted in the sun at Mary and Anton, whose heads were just visible, bobbing above the tobacco at the other end. They were also hunting bugs. He said impatiently, "Max, I don't need no Callahan to tell me the buyers give us the dirty end of the stick. This year the farmers'll be a bunch of dopes if they don't get better prices. Labor's been plenty high."

Kahn's long nose hitched back. "Greetings from Callahan. You're beginning to talk just like him already. You don't know how to pay your labor. Let the Polack drink plenty and charge him for it. And the *shicksa*, you can take her out to the woods. A woman ought to pay you for what you can give her."

The blood flared in Moe's face and flowed to his neck.

"Pip, pip, you don't have to get mad, you don't have to get red as a soup beet. I know these women."

Max Kahn had been a foundling. He used to boast that as a child, running hungry through the village streets, he had

often stopped husky peasant women to ask for milk from their breasts, and at the age of twelve he had started bringing bastards into the world. Contrary to his advice to Moe, since the death of his wife, Max hadn't touched any of the girls or women working on his farms.

"Get what you can out of them. They get what they can out of us. This is advice from a friend, fatherly advice."

"What's the matter?" Moe broke out fiercely. "Do I need two fathers to bring me into this world?" And with this shot, he left Max in the middle of the field and raced off to rid his plants of bugs and worms.

A flicker darkened Max's reddish, pushed-in eyes. He hoisted up his shoulders as if he didn't know what all the shouting was about and, grinding his teeth against his pain, he waddled back to inform his friends it was no longer the drunkard Moishe was defending, but also the red-headed whore.

Moe had been in a smoldering rage before Max showed up to look over the tobacco. He had realized suddenly that the worms had caught him napping. He worked like a dozen men, and long after his help had knocked off, when it was too dark to see his hands before his face, he was picking up leaves, smashing worms under his heel.

At daybreak, he was at it again. Here and there they had cut out the hearts of the prime leaves, piling their droppings in heaps. Near his seedplants were traces of skunk dung, like splatters of fresh tar; and stalks were cracked where they had reached to get the juicy worms. The worms were fattening, and some were as thick as a thumb. They raised themselves in threatening positions, making gritty sounds with their jaws.

Slowly and painfully, Moe won over them. After supper, the soles of his feet burning fiercely and his legs aching, he sat with his gun among the young birches lining the most infested field. Crickets hammered the evening air like a bunch of loose tappets.

He was squatting among the birches, humped and motionless as a rock, when the crunch of footsteps roused him. He had already come to know Mary's step. For a moment, he had a mind to tell her to get the hell home; he wouldn't get within a mile of the stinking skunks with her around. Had he kept his eyes open and not spooned with her, he wouldn't have let the worms march up on him. He did not answer her kiss, and yanked his head back when she pulled at his shaggy hair.

"I guessed you were keeping the worms company." Her hair was piled, bright as if she had just washed it. She wore a fresh dress that swished freely about her hips, and he could tell she had nothing on underneath. She sat down next to him, put her hand on his knee, and stared questioningly at him. When he scowled, she merely grinned and drew a pack of cigarettes from her pocket.

He felt himself slowly softening, but the sight of the cigarettes made him raise his hand sharply. "Smoke'll drive them away."

"Maybe you don't want me to talk, neither."

"The less the better."

She stopped smiling and asked in a low voice. "Skunks understand English?"

He ignored the thrust and stared glumly over the field, from which the evening damp was beginning to rise. The

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plants, after their terrific beating by the sun, were straightening up and fleshing out in the dew.

"You're all alike," Mary said. "Soon as a man starts growing tobacco, he goes wacky. There was my father. He killed himself, he about killed the rest of the family." She drew a cigarette from the pack and tapped it.

"I told you I want no smokin here!"

"I heard you," she said coolly. She stared firmly at him, but he kept his eyes riveted on the field. "I had plenty of this, plenty. Going nuts about bugs, hail, buyers! Sweet Jesus, I remember."

Lips set stonily, Moe was not moved by her outburst.

"I was five years old when my mother had me go out picking worms. Boy, we had half our crop eaten. I was scared, so she squashed one of the damn things on my face to get me used to them."

Moe's eyes remained on the great plants into which he had sunk so much of his sweat.

"When I wouldn't pick them, she beat me. My father never interfered with her, and he never laid a hand on any of us kids. Looked up to the Irish, I suppose," she said bitterly. "After the licking, I still wouldn't pick bugs. I wouldn't eat, went on some kind of a crazy hunger strike, got so sick she was scared and called the doctor. I won that summer, but that was only one crop. I couldn't go on fighting it all the time, not if I was to stay on the farm."

He had listened to her story without comment. He was amazed at all the bitterness she had stored up. "No farm ever made a fella stay on it," he muttered.

"Love it or leave it! Is that what you mean?"

"By cripes, sure. I got no time to cry or snort on anybody's neck."

She leaped to her feet, stung. "You got time to sit waiting for a stinking——"

"That's my job."

"And I suppose you was wasting time on me, too."

"I shoulda spent more time on the job." He said it with calm severity, judging himself.

"Sure." She checked the break in her voice. "We're getting in each other's hair."

He pulled up his shoulders and turned to watch the field.

"I ain't doing you no good," she said. "You could have warned me. I quit."

He gripped his gun and heaved his big body up. "That's all right with me. I'll get your pay."

When he returned with the money, she was smoking quietly. She nodded and walked off, dropping her cigarette. A whippoorwill was whistling in the woods. She disappeared among the trees, and for a long time Moe heard her whistling back, a couple of fingers in her mouth like a boy.

The Millers learned about the quarrel soon enough. Mrs. Miller found it hard to restrain a gloating smile as Moe tramped into the kitchen, late for dinner, next day. Anton was on his way out picking his teeth, and the old man took his book and with a warning twitch of his eyebrows went to the porch.

Her motions quick and nervous, Mrs. Miller bustled around Moe attentively. On her high cheeks the color flamed again, and her black eyes were piercingly bright.

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"Anton was just saying you can get along without extra help until cutting time," she ventured.

Moe tore his bread without looking up.

"He says Martin, on the pheasant farm, is looking for work in case you do need extra help."

He chewed, grinding his food wearily, and would not give her a purchase.

Exasperated by his stubborn silence, she pried at him again. The terrible fears of the last few weeks had given way so quickly to a feeling of joy that it almost unbalanced her and made her cry out recklessly, "I'll speak to Anton."

He swallowed hard, and bending his neck, muscular as though it had been toughened by a massive yoke, paid no more attention to her than if she had been a horn fly.

"Those Foleys! You were right. They can't—"

He put his spoon down and raised his bloodshot eyes. "Will you let me eat?"

She turned white. "I am a mother, Moey. Why don't you see I must help? We show you a pit of fat, but you crawl elsewhere to dirty yourself." Her smooth plump hands, like those of a young girl, flew to her throat. "The apple does not fall far from the tree. That Mary thinks she is everything. She is only a chit."

Moe brought his fist, hard as a tackle block, down on the table. "Ma, I don't like that!"

"What did I say that was wrong? All I said was she's a chit."

"I don't like the way you said that word," he shouted, rising from the table.

She quailed before his wrath. She gave a little terrified whimper. All the plans which she had built up so painfully

through the years seemed to come smashing down on her head. She lost complete control of herself. "Chit, chit, chit," she repeated.

Miller rushed into the room in his slapping carpet slippers. Moe pushed his chair back and walked out without finishing his meal.

She burst into tears. "Can't I say a word to him? Am I his mother, Israel, or a rag?"

"Why did you have to begin?" asked the old man in dismay. "Everything was going to your satisfaction, but you couldn't let it alone. You must make it worse. Ah, you mothers, you dear Hebrew women! The Egyptian midwives called you lively. How right they were."

Now that her Israel was at her side, she felt stronger. Gone was the fear and the feeling of inferiority which always gripped her when she had to face life's grave issues alone. But she sobbed reproachfully: "You are to blame. All you do is sit and read. Are you a father? I've asked again and again you should talk to him. But you crawl into Egypt and tell a story."

Though she needed him terribly now, she tried to push him away. He was too strong for her. He took her face in his hands and kissed her narrow willful forehead. "All right, mama, I'll talk to him. Enough, enough! I give my word as a Jew I'll talk."

CHAPTER XIX

A STORM WAS ROARING IN FROM THE RIVER. RAIN RIPPED across the roof of the shed, making it hard for the old man to be heard. He had steeled himself for one of the most distasteful tasks of his life and, finding Moe busy, he had broken in on him almost as wildly as the storm itself. Moe had listened to him in silence.

"The Talmud says life is a wedding to some men. Grab eat, grab drink, grab. Such men——"

"You mean the Kahns."

The breath was yanked out of the old man's mouth. "In God's name, Moe, why do you put words into my mouth?" He knew with what contempt this boy regarded his friendship with Max Kahn.

Moe looked away from his father. Framed in the doorway, he stared darkly at his fields, hammered by wind and rain.

"Have it your way," the father went on. "The Kahns! Am I such an old fool that I don't see their humps? You and I have humps of our own, but our eyes are not in the back of our heads so we can see them. Why do you look at me? It is true. One of these days you will see. . . . My son, all we want is you should know what you are doing. You are a strong young man. It is only right you should want a woman."

Moe waited him out, respectful and grim. "Pa, if I need a woman, I'll go hire her."

The old man snatched off his spectacles to see him better.

"What kind of talk is that for you? Moe, why do you make it so hard for people to come to you?"

"What's wrong? Don't I hire a man if I need him?"

"Sometimes I think your mother is right," cried the old man in despair. Cutting the conversation short, he left the shed. The wind flung itself at him, blowing up the baggy trousers around his thin shanks. He stumbled through the swollen puddles to the house.

From the first word, Miller had felt on the defensive, but his word to the mother had catapulted him head-on against the son. What right had he to speak when he was not eating the labor of his own hands, when he was a sickly failure sponging on this boy who in his harsh way had been a good son? How dared he charge him with not getting along with people when for years there had been none to show him how?

Yesterday, while he had been debating with himself how to approach the boy, Lou Callahan had visited. In spite of his wife's frowns, he had sat up late, drinking and talking farming. For a few hours he had been drunk with a joy stronger than his prune brandy. Had he not given this singled-out boy a substantial inheritance, the farm and a deep pleasure in working the soil? He had sobered up quickly enough after Lou had left to ask himself the pointed question: "At what expense?" He had sacrificed his wife and done the boy no good, leaving both alone for months at a time to keep the farm his own. Ah, he groaned to himself, as he reached the shelter of the porch, the shoe-maker's son goes without shoes and the teacher's without learning.

Miller fled into the house. He was so exhausted he could

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not change his wet clothing. To kill his bitter thoughts, he buried himself in a novel by Victor Hugo and, while the storm rose to a pitch of fury, he walked along the streets of the Paris of "The Hunchback of Notre Dame."

The rain blasted the country, hurling the tobacco plants on their heads, whirling the leaves around them, trampling them in the mud, and chocolate channels and streams raced from the ridge into the yard and foamed around the house.

Terrified by the storm, which for a time threatened to assume the disastrous proportions of the hurricane of 1938, Mrs. Miller locked all the windows, drew down the shades, and sat in the dark calling for the old man. He hurried to her, and put his arms protectingly around her slender shoulders. He sat, holding his wife and his book.

Neither of them slept that night. After the storm had spent itself, Moe got into his truck and drove off. He was not back by a late hour. The mother remembered the first night he had been away. Bitterly regretting his talk, the old man lay at her side as if he were nailed between the sheets. His face burned with his shame. In the morning, when the truck returned, he slipped out of bed to be of some help to the boy. His wife was awake. She hastened downstairs to prepare breakfast.

Moe ducked in for a minute. He had fed the gang of workers in town. He found boots and coats for the men. Without protection for himself, he led the field. He did his own row and helped the others, raising the plants and booting the dirt down to support them, pressing firmly as if he were working a pedal.

He had picked up the men in George Kahn's flophouse—a third-class musician who had been in the army; a

broken-down lumberjack from Maine, who discharged wind all day like a horse; and a jobless housepainter with sunken eyes and a yellowish face.

Ignoring his wife's warning, Miller went out to give a hand. With a pitying glance at the painter, he instructed him how to set up the plants. He carried water. At the table he helped his wife serve, talked about the war, exchanged notes about army experiences with the musician.

The setting was finished by nightfall. Before letting the men go, Moe tried to hire the musician for the rest of the season. The men struck together—take all or none. They promised to come back for cutting.

Showers broke out that night, and Moe again went to the flophouse. He found only the sickly, coughing painter, who worked a few hours and then quit. Moe and Anton had to set alone.

Anton clogged along in his big shapeless shoes, grumbling and whining, envying the pheasants, who are not arrested by the police, are not sent to chop wood in a Hitler camp or forced to get wet in the tobacco. Ah, the pheasants and the birds of the air! They don't need clothes, and their food is everywhere, free like a lunch counter. Dog's blood, but he had seen a little lousy bird, a sparrow no bigger than a knuckle, tumble his hen thirty times in ten minutes. Could Moe name him a man able to take his woman thirty times?

Yes, the work was getting Anton. Drink alone could no longer satisfy him.

He dressed up after work, and nothing was seen of him until late the next day. He sought Moe in the field and, reeking of whiskey, confided to him: "I waited until the red-haired one and her brother went to Horton. The *Panna*

still has no job. Ruby treated me to a little *schnapps*. When they returned, I had to hide in the shed with the goat. All night the rascal sniffed me like I was a she."

The work was beginning to get Moe, too, but he finished the last of the setting up alone because of Anton's new activities. His eyes glazed and his hands so numb he could hardly roll himself a cigar, he went into the house to spend the rest of the morning doing easy desk work. He had bills to go over and entries to make in his time book.

His parents talked in the next room. "Not another word, Esther," cried the old man, losing his temper with her, something he had never been known to do. "Do not be a cookspoon meddling all the time. Enough is enough!"

While they were quarreling, the Packard clattered into the yard. Rose was in desperate need of their help. There was trouble again on the plantation. Forgetting their quarrel, they left with her immediately.

As the car splashed out, Moe rose. Bleary-eyed, he paced the floor. In the parlor, he picked up the book his father had been reading. Hugo was describing Captain Phoebus's meeting with the gypsy girl. "He snatches her georgette completely off, and she in turn throws her arms around his neck. Quite intoxicated, he presses glowing lips to those lovely African shoulders, and the young girl, her eyes cast upward to the ceiling, is all trembling and palpitating under his kisses."

With a curl of his lips, Moe dropped the book. He crossed the room, walking awkwardly like a horse with a leg over the tugs. He put on his oilskins and sou'wester and went into the fields again. He walked the rows, breaking off an occasional bud, thinking that perhaps this afternoon

he could top and sucker the big plants to get them in better shape to stand another storm. As he barged over the muddy ground, a dog streaked up over the road, and showed its teeth at a safe distance. Behind the beagle filed the hunters —Hy, Harry and his boy, and Cooky.

Hy lead the gang in a hunter's corduroy suit and high boots. "Hello, Moo. Ain't you got enough sense to keep out of the rain?"

Harry left the others and threaded his way up between the broad plants. "Storm didn't do much harm." He surveyed the tobacco approvingly and thumbed a leaf. "Got a great crop, Moey. Best I've seen. I'll bet the buyers hang around you like a bunch of botflies this fall."

By the shine in his long face and the dance and shift in his light blue eyes, it was clear he had been drinking. In spite of his wife, he jumped the track ever so often to become the three-glass Harry of old.

Moe spat in disgust. "Ain't you got nathin else to do but ram around with a gun?"

"'A well regulated militia being necessary to the securing of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.'"

"Hangin out with that bum!"

"What's a man to do, Moey, if he lives in a house by the side of the road where the race of man goes by? Genghis came over with his troubles to this Connecticut Yankee and, by Christ, I always make time for my friends. You know that, Moe."

When you pushed this Harry far enough, you hit against a man who could be sharp and hard and who could fight back, instead of the easy-going, two-timing politician.

THE OUTSIDE LEAF

"Genghis slept over last night. Rose came looking for him, and I had to lie my fool head off. This time it's serious; he's leaving the old man flat. I'm doing my best to patch it up, but it's like trying to get old Max and Lou Callahan to sit at the same table. The boy's set on enlisting in the air corps. Once he's in, I think he'll be all right. Oh, if Hy had your father to talk to!"

"Some more talk." With that brief, sour comment, Moe pulled his sou'wester down over his face and left Harry and the other hunters.

Some time later Moe heard the hunters again. He was standing under a birch, out of the rain. A bedraggled sparrow perched on a branch above him. A crack sounded behind him like two stones hitting each other. Something struck his sou'wester. His hand came down with blood and a wad of feathers.

Hy came striding toward him. "I got that sparrow, and so did you," he mooed. He held up a gun. "What a soldier you'd make."

It was the shotgun which Moe had left in the fence after his quarrel with Mary.

Hy said airily and patronizingly, "Son, I got something for you. Harry ain't interested because he don't want to cheat on Babe. I didn't pick it up on Windsor Street, either. It beats a white girl coming and going, mostly coming." He pushed his red-crowned hunter's cap back over his ears, which were unusually small for a man, pointed and pinned back. "She's got tits on her like the wild grapes that grow around here in September."

Moe growled, "So you become a pimp in your old age?"

Hy wasn't offended. He smiled a tender, indolent smile.

"Moo, how's that little red mare you been riding? I tried mounting her, but——"

Moe hurled the gun down. He jerked around and smashed him in the face, felling him.

Harry leaped between them. "Whoa, there! Whoa!"

Moe tore off his oilskins. "We'll see who's ridin who. This ain't Maine, where you left me with a truck full of hay and spent our last gas money on a couple of whoores, you pimp!"

Hy got to his feet, his coat slimy with mud. There was a red welt across his face. He touched his swollen lips and whistled. "All right, hayfoot, model youth. When I get through with you, Max Kahn won't know you from a hole in the ground."

He straddled like an old-fashioned fighter, feinted, weaved, and stepped back with a yawn as Moe rushed him. Calling Harry to watch, he clipped Moe on the jaw.

The blow stunned Moe. Shaking his head, he tried to bull Hy. Hy waltzed out of the way and slapped him on the nape of the neck. Moe stalked him, weighing his fist.

"Gents!" Again Harry tried to get between them. "Look at the example you're setting for the younger generation. Gentlemen, enough!"

The kids had broken out of the woods and were running toward them. The beagle made for Moe. Young Harry caught her in time. Cooky flew to Moe. "Big stuff, I'll be your second. Knock his block off!"

"That won't help him, Mick." Hy was bleeding from nose and mouth. "When I get through with him there won't be a stub for your sister." He ducked as Moe thundered down on him.

THE OUTSIDE LEAF

Harry was roaring mad. "I'll be hanged if I'm going to let you murder each other. I'm justice of the peace here, and I'll lock up both of you, damn it to hell!"

"Just one more lick at him," begged Hy. "I'll flatten him like a cowflop." He hit Moe in the stomach to get his guard down, and then he put everything he had into the next punch.

They were mixing it up this way when darkness began and the rain dumped down on them like a load of stones. Mauling each other with punishing blows, sliding in the mud, they were torn apart at last by Harry.

Harry forced Hy into the jeep, and the hunters drove away. Left in possession of the field, Moe picked up his oilskins and sou'wester and set out for the stable. On the sill of the stable window stood a dusty bottle of liniment. He poured the stuff on his hands and smeared it over his swollen thumb. He sat down on a box, snorting and wiping the blood off his face with a horse blanket. The rain had let up and was picking like a chicken in the yard. He stared into the drizzle through puffed eyes.

The mill whistles piped up along the river. A down train hooted. Footsteps splashed in the yard. He raised his head painfully. It was Mary.

Moe turned from her, took the bottle, and poured more of the liniment over his fist.

Mary put her hands on his shoulders. "Jesus, what a sight! It's a face only a mother or a sweetheart could love." She took the bottle from him and held his hand, which he tried to pull away. Gently, firmly, skillfully, she examined his thumb. Running a finger over the old scars, she said, "Cooky swears you made hash of the Genghis."

Moe winced at the pain. "That skirt-chaser can use his goddamn fists!"

"I can see that, but you can't." There were shadows under her eyes. She looked thinner. "You can't chase skirts and you can't fight," she said softly, rubbing in the stuff.

He spread his feet and, reaching out his hand for support, heaved himself up to the door. It was raining hard now. Mary flung his oilskins over him, giggled at his great girth, and helped him across the yard. She hesitated at the door. There was a look of relief on her face when she saw they were alone.

She cried gaily, "You change into clean clothes. I'll get something to eat. Anton here?"

His lips twitched. "Anton's visitin'."

She shot a glance at him, and then went to the sink to wash her hands.

He was seated at the table, holding his head, when she came out with meat, milk, and bread. "Ain't you changin'?"

"No," he said doggedly.

"I'll be switched if I don't think you want me to change you into dry pants."

"You can try."

She tossed her head and laughed. Quickly and cleanly, she sliced the bread and meat while he watched her. "You're just like Cooky—big shot always wants to have his own way." She poured the milk and, with a challenging, saucy look, sipped a little. "It's fresh," she announced.

He ignored the glass and tore up the meat somberly. She got dessert from the pantry—sliced pineapple and the sugar horns made as only Mrs. Miller could make them.

THE OUTSIDE LEAF

When she returned, his glass was empty. She smiled and stood by, ready to attend to his wants, as quick and as clean as his mother, knowing when to keep her mouth shut. He dropped his head, chewed massively, the hair around his ears black and curly and wet like a little boy's.

A horn honked. The Packard drove into the yard with a clattering of loose tappets and steam rushing from its radiator.

Mary paled, and Moe, peering at her from under his heavy brows, said gruffly, "Sit down and eat."

"I ain't hungry."

"Sit down and eat, I said!"

She sat down as footsteps ascended the porch.

CHAPTER XX

MARY ROSE AS THE MILLERS WALKED IN. WITH AN UNCERTAIN smile, she said, "Hullo, folks. Can I fix you something to eat?"

Mrs. Miller marched to the table and picked up the milk bottle.

Moe reached for it, pulled it from her grasp, and filled his glass.

Her lips pressed together tightly, stabbing the girl with a dark look, Mrs. Miller whirled around and left the room.

The old man, flushing, spread out his hands. "She gets upset when she sees meat and milk mixed. As a Jewish housewife, to her it's the highest law." He caught his

breath and stared at the boy. "Moey, what happened to you? In God's name!"

Upstairs doors banged. The old man turned white, and with a muttered apology hastened out of the kitchen, leaving them together again.

Coolly Moe helped himself to more meat. "Sit down. That's part of her act. The old man always falls for it. You'll be in for more of them if you hang around."

"I should of known better," Mary cried out in vexation. "You should of told me, Moe! Your mother's got the right to be boss in her own home."

"I heard you," he said dryly. "Try this meat. It ain't bad." He forked her a piece.

She picked like a sparrow, put her fork down, and eyed him with deep reproach. "It wasn't right of you, Moe."

He chuckled. "You're just like Al Wood. He was gonna take care of this Jew boy, too. Al was a fella so tight he'd give me a piece of plug no bigger than this." He measured off his thumb. "He'd say it swells up when you chew it. I worked for him one year when Max rented our place. When Passover come around, Al was worried about my eatin bread." The memory of this cantankerous, miserly farmer caring for the wants of a hired man made Moe laugh out loud.

Mary smiled faintly. "He knew you come of a good Jewish family and aimed to do what's right."

"Yeh. My mother stuck in the city, wanted me in the worse way to leave the farm and get a job in a factory. The old man'd come back every coupla weeks to get a smell of grass. He'd see Al, but he never said nathin to him about Passover. He don't bother about these things

unless my mother eggs him on. So here's Al, a fella so tight he'd skin a louse for the fat he'd get off it, is worried about my eatin bread. He makes a special trip to Hartford to get some matzoth. He read all about it in the Bible to make sure. Wanted me to look it up, too."

"You wouldn't do that," said Mary, giving him all her attention now; things had quietened upstairs. "You wouldn't read the Bible."

Her sarcasm had no more effect than if she had shot a pea at him. "If it was a farm bulletin or a manual for a tractor, maybe," he said.

"Oh, God, Moey, you sure take the cake!" And she burst out laughing. "Sometimes I don't know how your folks stand you."

Moe rose, giving her a stern, piercing glance.

Mary began gathering the dishes. She said thoughtfully, "A fellow doesn't know how lucky he is. Take my mother. What a difference!"

He winced as he settled his cap on his head; his thumb was swollen to twice its size. "I ain't gonna spend half the day fightin with you if my mother is better than your mother. It's a kid's game." With that he walked out, leaving her with the dishes.

She came out later, in boots and raincoat, and found him topping the tobacco. She said, with a great deal of relief, "Your mother came down for tea. She's feeling better."

He stared at her in his hard, ungracious way and, shrugging his shoulders, fell to work again.

Moe moved fast, taking two rows to her one, breaking off the crowns to help the top-heavy plants withstand another slugging of wind and rain. When he had finished far

ahead of her, he wheeled about to give her a hand, and she couldn't help stopping for a moment to watch him bearing down upon her, his fists full of the tops of the massive green leaf and the faintly fragrant, tender, pink suckers.

"Boy," she breathed, "you sure are working like a house on fire."

He snapped off a crown and dropped it under the bottom leaves, then looked sharply at her. "Too much for you?"

"Not the plants."

"What then?"

"You. I can't figure you out."

And he had been sweating trying to figure her out. His lips twitched. He picked up her hand. "You'll get blisters, Mary. Rub some dirt on it. Like this." He rubbed mud over her hand roughly. "That'll help. It ain't bad when it's wet. Wait till we get dry, hot weather. The tops will be like rubber, and them suckers are tough as wood. When you get a rainy spell, suckers grow on suckers."

"Trying to scare me?"

A smile flicked over his swarthy face. "Naw, just givin' you the brass facts of life."

"I see." She asked softly, "Do you know, Moey, you're holding hands in the broad daylight?"

"I always know what I'm doin'."

"Boy, you're full of gab today. Is it the fight with the Genghis or me?"

He ignored the question. "Look, when you're through, squeeze the juice out of the tops, and you got somethin'll get the nicotine off better than any of them soaps or creams." He dropped her hands.

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The powerful back, broad as a truck, the ropelike belt around the capacious middle truly reminded her of a monk, a hawk-nosed six footer, whom she had seen in a cathedral that she had once entered to say Mass. Strength, doggedness, sureness of purpose were in one thick knot here. She was a girl of temper, but no fool. A woman would have to bury all that bone and muscle and flesh, all that bullheaded mass deep, deep within herself to mark or change it.

Dear Christ, Mary said to herself, marveling at her rush of feeling, here is something to take on and hold for a lifetime.

CHAPTER XXI

THE JEEP SKIDDED INTO THE FARMYARD, OVERTURNING THE bench in the Genesareth hut. A little unsteadily, Hy got out. Holding Beauty in his arms, he limped into the farmhouse.

Hy was still wearing the hunting suit, which was caked with mud. He had lost his hat. His lower lip was split and one eye blackened. Hushing Mrs. Miller, who ran to him with a moan of pity, he gave her his left hand. "I'm going to take care of the war front, Esther, and leave Moe to take care of the other fronts. Say good-bye to Uncle Is for me."

Mrs. Miller would not hear of his going. She ran upstairs to pour a bath for him, laid out a fresh change of clothes, and flew downstairs to prepare him a bite. While she was busy, Hy was in the pantry with the decanter of prune brandy. With swimming eyes, he stared through the win-

dow at the tobacco massed wherever he looked. Moodily he pulled at the beagle's lank ears until she growled, and then he went out, took Esther by the waist, and kissed her hard.

Flushed, she followed him to the jeep, pleading with him to stay. "Then come Saturday night. We'll have a little party. You don't know how much you hurt Rose and your father. The war can wait another day. Promise, Hymie. The Tannenbaums will be here. You remember Joe, his wife Tania, and Sadie with whom you went to school. Sadie is married and has a little boy. Promise."

Hy leaped into the jeep, promising he would try, and with his siren wailing and the beagle yapping, roared into the road and over the bridge. The last she saw of him was his battered head thrown back, singing, "Ah, Sadie, my dear little lady, remember the woods where I delivered the goods."

Instead of following Mrs. Miller's advice, Hy drove back to the plantation and got into a quarrel with his father over money. Then he disappeared. All efforts to find him were in vain.

Late Saturday afternoon the Tannenbaums arrived. As Moe was dressing for supper, the talk that drifted into his room was about Hy and the war. During supper, they had Hy between mouthfuls. At tea they came back to Hy.

Miller labored to make his friends feel at home, labored to have the women take Hy's departure bravely. "It's the best thing in the world for Hyman. The army will take some of the wildness out of him. He will have plenty of fighting." He looked at Moe, who had risen from the table and was standing with his taped hand against the doorpost.

THE OUTSIDE LEAF

The old man's lips twisted in a wry smile. He had found out about the drubbing the boys had given each other.

Rose was at the other end of the room, in the shadows, trying to hide her red eyes. He spoke tenderly. "He will come back, he will come back. We will make a colossal feast for him. Nebuchadnezzar will come from Babylon to offer a toast. Mama will serve roast Leviathan and the Messiah's Bull, and you, Joe, and your family will be invited as honored guests."

Joe Tannenbaum gave his slow broad smile. Everything was slow and broad about Joe—his smile, his speech, his body that was laid out like a square, his hands that he kept as clean as a surgeon so as not to infect his precious leg-horns. This excellent poultryman raised his own corn and wheat, had his own incubators, called his old clucks by name, and in his fatherly way ran their family life.

Joe kept smiling broadly. "Ah, dear Iser, you are still the patriot. Remember when you helped me become a citizen? I came before the judge and I forgot everything. You saved my life. You got permission from the judge to take me to the toilet. In there, you hammered into my thick skull the answers I should make to the judge's questions."

The company of these simple people and their deference had driven the anxious look from Mrs. Miller's eyes and put the rose into her white cheeks. She picked up a book the old man had been reading. It was a child's history of England. She always managed to cover herself with an edge of the old man's cloak of learning. "He is still the learner and teacher," she said with a little pride and some derision. "He will never change. Even that drunken Polack, he is helping him become a citizen."

"Why not, my pretty wife?" asked Miller. "You and I do not have to sit on a bench in black clothing. We can be the judges of what makes a man a citizen. Work. Anton has poured his sweat out in our country as a miner and a farmer. That is enough. He is a man without a wife and child, and so he goes in unto a bottle. A man can go crazy being sober all the time. Now that the Berliner fiend has shed Jewish and Polish blood, we are close. I do what I can to help my brother."

Joe shook his head in slow wonder at the old man. Then he turned to Moe, standing aloof near the door. "What do you say, Moishale? When will you be in the army?"

Moe said, "When I get my crop in, the draft board can call me up."

Mrs. Miller blanched. She tried to force the conversation into another channel, shoving a plate of her sugar horns under Tannenbaum's broad nose.

Grateful to Moe for not having shamed him before others, the old man interrupted her. "If our son goes, I can rent the farm and keep it for him until he comes back. Maybe I can find work. There is a war. Health or no health, I must do something. Max might make me his book-keeper. We would move in with him. I don't think Rose would throw us out."

Fervently Rose placed her hands on his shoulders. "Never. Didn't you take us in after poor mama passed away? Now, with Hymie gone and papa so terribly busy he can't visit for an hour, the big house will be awfully lonesome. I know."

Tannenbaum switched his glance from the red-eyed girl to Moe.

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The parents noticed that, and Miller could see all the dignity and pride go out of his comely woman, the queen of his Sabbath, with her high rhinestone comb and milk-white eardrops. She looked like a little girl bewildered by one of the sudden twists and turns of her life. He groaned inwardly. To create a diversion, he pounced upon Tannenbaum's grandchild and danced him on his knee. He started singing one of his favorite songs, about Jewish children.

Moe had gone out into the yard. All evening he had been trying to get a word in edgewise, but the great concern, particularly his mother's, had been for that loafer Hy. Since the talk in the shed, his father had scrupulously made no comments about him and Mary. He hadn't let drop so much as a hint as to how he felt. Now in the song all his accumulated feelings were coming out.

Moe's affection for the old man was grounded less in what the old man was than in what he had always tried to be—an honest farmer, doing things with his own hands, like Joe Tannenbaum. In the midst of the family and the Tannenbaums, whom Moe regarded so highly, he had realized that he was pushed back, that he stood alone and out in the cold.

As he crossed the yard, the door opened. Rose called. He stopped with a savage curse. She came toward him, her big breasts shaking.

Moe heard his father singing inside the house, reciting the virtues of little Jews, fresh from their eggs—ah, the little birds, the little birds.

Rose clutched his arm, and as she raised her face she reminded him of those blundering, knuckle-headed wood-moths that often flapped against him when he was plowing

by night, drawn by his lights, getting singed and crushed, yet coming on for more punishment.

"Moey, I'm so terribly worried about Hy," she panted. "We called up the draft board. They don't know where he is."

Moe had his doubts about this great recruit, but he kept grimly silent.

Her moist hand was clamped possessively on his arm. "Moey, why did you and Hymie fight?"

He looked away.

"Who began it?"

"I knocked him down."

"You don't have to make things easier for him. He's spoiled. Mama and I spoiled him." She looked eagerly at Moe. "Aunt Esther's spoiled him."

"You don't have to tell me that," he said bitterly.

She nodded. "Papa doesn't know how to handle him. He's always calling him a good-for-nothing. He's always saying, 'Look at Moe. There's an example to follow.'"

"I don't follow him. He don't follow me."

In the parlor, Tannenbaum had joined in singing the praises of Jewish children. Above his deep bass, rose the voice of the old man singing the little boys playing under the trees with their fringes, little coats, and earlocks, and when he rolled out the "Moishelachs," the little Moeys, there was a sob in his throat.

Rose blocked his way. "Why," she insisted huskily, "did you fight?"

At last he understood what she was after. "It was about Cooky," he said through his teeth, still trying to spare her feelings.

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"Cooky? Oh!" She saw he was lying. The whole country knew the fight had started because of Mary. She gave a little gasp and pointed to a star over the poplar trees. "Isn't that beautiful, Moe? Oh, what a wonderful evening!"

She could gab for hours, blatting about stars and sunsets and the smell of the soil which made something turn inside her stomach—sentiments for which he would not swap five minutes spent with crooked-mouthed Cooky.

It was too much to listen to her with one ear and with the other to the praises of Jewish children sung by his disappointed father. Moe struck out brutally, "I got no time. I got some business with Mary Foley."

Rose grew white. She gave a sickly smile, and her hand went to her thick throat. Moe turned away, and a few seconds later the door clapped behind her.

A couple of fireflies, the last sparks of summer, twinkled in the Genesareth hut. Through the dusk padded Anton. He was carrying his shoes.

Moe cleared his throat. "Bartasus, don't go in there."

"There is singing. Old Testament wants me to sing."

"Not now, Anton. Now they are making Jewish children."

Anton gawked. "Hah?"

"Sure. You're a drunken Polack, a goy, a pig-eater. What in hell do you know?"

"I'm an American," cried the Bartasus, standing erect. "I'm getting the papers."

"Your papers won't help. It's Jewish children they want."

"Children, ak," said the little Pole. He dropped on the

splintered bench and, hugging his shoes, gazed off into the distance.

Moe looked down at Anton, and for the first time saw him as he was—a lonesome little guy whose only fun in life was a bought drink and a woman hired for a couple of minutes. He sat down beside him. "How you makin out with the woman?"

Anton's fist flew up and pounded his hard, wedge-like chest. "That Mary, she is ruining her mother. You cannot touch the old wench with the end of a bean stick."

Moe nodded soberly. "That's the way them women are."

With a groan, Anton put on his shoes and entered the farmhouse.

Moe walked over to his car. In his mind's eye, he could see the Foleys coming down the bank to welcome him, that red-haired girl of his surprised and happy. He smiled. Drop by drop, his bitterness had vanished.

CHAPTER XXII

"I KIND OF EXPECTED YOU," SAID MARY, GETTING IN BESIDE Moe. She smiled as he demanded how in hell she knew he was coming.

"A little hawk told me."

They crossed the river and took in an open-air movie at Riverside Park. Then they drove south along the river, through the Locks and Windsor, into Hartford. They bought plums at a fruit stand and sat in the car, parked near

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the river meadows, spitting out plum stones and listening to the crickets reeling their endless ratchet.

Mary said, "Anna's invited us to dinner tomorrow."

He threw a stone into the river. "I don't like that girl."

"You'll like Charley."

"I don't like her."

"Your mother don't care for me, but that don't stop us, does it?"

He was stumped.

"Try to make it, Moey." She bent over and kissed him.

He felt nettled to think she was beginning to take him for granted, acting as if everything were already cut and dried between them. Just as he had feared, she, the family girl, would try to catch him between the Foleys and the Millers. He would show her she wasn't going to have things her own way.

At the last moment, after chewing things over and seeing how she had put it up to him, he changed his mind. And the next day he was at the foot of the bank blowing his horn vigorously at the appointed time. Mary came out with Cooky, and as they walked down the bank together she laid down the law to the kid. "Nothing doing, I said. You stay home and keep an eye on the family. Somebody's been snooping around here."

She looked pointedly at Moe, who shifted his cigar in a slow grin. He had left Anton dolling up for another try, swearing that if necessary he would go to church and kneel before the local pope to snare that lizard of a woman.

"I got to go." Cooky danced around Mary. "I got to get Charley to look over the rifle."

"It ain't broke, honey. It's no use your prancing and

dancing. I ain't your mother, so you can't get away with it."

"Sis, but I got to sell him some of that salve." Cooky leaped on the running board. He was wearing his cutaway cap with a tiny figure of Uncle Sam and the boast: "He's My Uncle." "Look, Moey, I sold seed last spring and got a twenty-two rifle. I want to put a telescope sight on it. You can't tell about that Fifth Colyum and them landin spies from submarines. I got salves to sell. They cure from pimples to piles."

Moe was beginning to enjoy this. "Why don't you go see Max Kahn?"

"Good idea, big stuff!"

"Get off there, Cooky!"

"But, sis! Aw, Christ in hell, you'll be sorry." The kid's twisted mouth trembled. His cockiness all gone, he walked, downcast, back to the house.

Moe said, "You might let him come, Mary."

"He's got to learn to mind."

Tight lines formed around her mouth, and he said to himself: This'll make a mother, a good one, and he looked away and smiled.

The car hummed along. Drops of dew on trees and fences flashed like points in the sun. A bull lowered his head and with his horns plowed up the ground in a stubble field. The village was sunk in a Sunday stillness. The long green lawns before the homes of the big tobacco growers stretched to the edge of the road. Only in front of a white church were there people, and the bell, hung to what looked like a wagon wheel, started clanging.

They took the new highway and drove through Hart-

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ford toward the big bend of the Connecticut. Anna and Charley were living in a trailer town on the east bank of the river. They passed villages with receptacles like cribs or silos for the collection of aluminum to help the war effort. Houses were going up for defense workers—boxes that could be put on wheelbarrows. Trailers were everywhere: in farmyards, woodlots, on the grounds of gas stations. Once the government got down to building homes for the trailer people, there would be plenty of work for bulldozers.

Mary smoked quietly beside Moe, enjoying the leisurely ride. Out of the blue she shot a question at him. "Do you know they're reclassifying at the draft board?"

He turned to look at her.

"Harry told me. They're taking more farmboys, especially those on the tobacco farms."

He shrugged his shoulders and didn't give that a second thought. He didn't see clearly yet where this business with Mary would end, and his mind became busy once more with the prospects of buying a bulldozer for his "cat" this fall, making more outside money in order to hold on to this girl, buying a farm if his mother got on her high horse.

"Once you get married," contained Mary, "you'll have a better excuse for staying home."

"I ain't hidin behind no woman's skirt," he said fiercely.

She laughed, happy to have him react the way she knew he would. "Sometimes," she said, "I think you don't know what's happening in a skirt." She met his indignant stare with her level open gaze.

"I got plenty time to find out."

She whipped her fingers across his cheek, stinging him with her blunt nails. "What a man!" she mocked.

They were on the winding, looping road below Hartford and entering the rolling country watered by the lower Connecticut. Here were more dairy farms. In spots there was good tobacco land. Plantations of shade tobacco sloped to the river, the cloth glimmering like water in the sun.

Mary chewed over something. Then she said: "How's your mother?"

"She's out day and night burnin the road, worried about the great Genghis. He was supposed to go to a hospital to get his knee operated on before they take him in the air force. They don't know where the devil he is."

"Oh, he'll show up." Her face brightened. "If you don't put your foot in it, we'll be good friends, your mother and me. When I was cleaning house for her, we'd be talking about everything under the sun. One day, I don't know how it come about, she said Jews make the best husbands. I decided I'd have to try one."

Moe didn't appreciate the humor of that remark. He knocked the wheel with his big cracked knuckles. "That's what always gets me. Listen to her, and there's nathin lousy about any Jew."

"Now, Moe, she didn't mean it that way. I remember we were talking about that Betty Hinck. She's the girl that killed the doctor's wife she worked for. It was in the papers. When the trial come up, they found the doctor's wife was always nagging her, saying the doctor was sleeping with her. Your mother said no Jew would do that, especially an educated man, like a doctor."

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"That's ma all right. Blumenthal is a doctor, but he lives with a Polack girl. My mother won't call him in even when the old man's headaches drive him crazy."

"She's good to work for just the same, Moey. She's decent. I've worked for all kinds. I know. Any girl that does housework is in for something, and if she's a kitchen Cinderella for the rich she ought to have her head examined."

Moe looked hard at her. "The rich ain't all bastards."

"Like the priest said: It's trying to squeeze through the eye of a needle to find a good one."

While they rolled through the peaceful country, the air throbbing with the clang of church bells, Mary told him a little of what she had been through after she started going out to work. The hayseed still in her hair, she had worked near New London for a lawyer who had entertained lavishly and kept her on her feet eighteen hours a day. At Lyme, working for a broker, she was fired for slapping the oldest boy when he tried to get into her bed one night. Then came the job in New York, where she met Frankie, who was a silversmith for the boss's jewelry firm.

Presently they turned into a side road which led to Liberty Camp, a trailer town on a scrubby hill. There were dozens of stalls, each occupied by a trailer, many of the small camping type. Children and wash and cans were everywhere.

Anna was standing near a Plymouth sedan talking to a short man in brown coveralls. She hurried toward them, swaying her graceful shoulders. She took Moe in appraisingly, her lashes covering her slanting eyes. She teetered on spike-heeled, harness-studded shoes.

"Comin for tobacco help?" she drawled with a teasing smile.

Moe muttered that he had all the help he needed. He felt hot and uncomfortable in his tight, ill-fitting blue serge suit.

A chunky young fellow with dimpling cheeks and a boyish grin walked over. This was Charley. "So you're the man we got an earful when Red was here last?"

"Charley!" Mary cried menacingly.

"She sure was tryin to sell you. I said if she took a sample——"

Mary swung at him. He ducked and caught her, planting a kiss on her lips.

"You half-pint." She pulled his hair. "Go back to your car."

He shook his head wearily. "I been at it all mornin. Generator's been on the bum, and I got a rebuilt one. There's a short somewhere else, but I ain't been able to locate it." He looked helplessly at Moe.

Glad to put his hands to use and get out of the range of Anna's eyes, Moe shucked his coat. As Mary took it she declared proudly, "He's good."

"Didn't I tell you?" cried Charley. "Sis, you're a crackerjack salesman. You ain't sold this man short."

The girls went into the trailer. They had dinner ready soon, but Charley, taking his lead from Moe, refused to budge until they had found the short. Then they went inside for dinner, and Moe and Mary listened to Anna's complaints of life in a trailer camp and her man's story of work in a war factory.

Mary had been studying her sister with marked disap-

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proval. "I like a big house. I like a place I can call my own, but if you got a good job and a good man, this'll do for the time."

Moe confined his attention to his meal. He had taken a liking to this Charley and wondered how he had fallen for a split-rail like Anna. He, too, was highly critical of this coop, but he kept quiet, not making it harder for a good guy.

After dinner, his thumbs cocked into his belt, his cigar at an angle in his mouth, a good dinner lining his stomach, Moe tipped his chair back against the wall and listened gravely.

"I don't like to crab in front of outsiders," Charley said, "but, Moe, you're as good as in the family. You got a quick hand, a good eye, and your mouth parts is tight. We certainly need some good men in the plant, which is in a mess. Maybe we'd get things done."

Anna perked up. Her clipped and pencilled eyebrows rose expectantly. "There's a trailer for sale cheap here, one of them custom-built kind. You could rent a stall here easy."

Charley went on enthusiastically: "Sure, and Mary can land her job. There's a girl down back in one of the trailers was a manicurist. She took trainin courses. Now she's makin tank-gun parts, earnin forty a week, straight time."

Mary let out her breath slowly and leaned forward, her lips parted, drinking in every word.

"I was on a farm before I got this job," Charley went on. "Outside of workin as a bouncer in a skatin rink, where I bowled over Anna, and a coupla months on the river during the hurricane, all I did was farmin. I milked my cows

and drew my hay, and we had some tobacco, too—Havana seed. I got out first chance I had. Good mechanic belongs in a plant where he can do most good.”

Now Moe understood why Mary had been so eager to have him meet Charley. Nothing was settled between them, but she acted in the meantime as if she could get him into a vise, where she could work him to her will. He unfastened his teeth from his cigar. “If it’s war you talkin about, you got to have the farm as much as the factory.”

“That’s right,” Mary admitted readily. “Nothing’s a bed of roses these days. Not for people like us anyway. On the farm you have your own house. You got a car to go out. But you don’t know how you’re coming out with the buyers and the hail and the hurricane and the bugs, and—Jesus give me strength to click off all the rest.”

Moe waited until she was through. Her eyes held him every second while she was making her point, and he noticed how hard her jaw was as she came out swinging. But he was on his own ground, and that thick tongue of his was unusually limber. He said emphatically, “There’ll always be bugs and hail and buyers. The buyers is like them hog lice—suck, suck, suck.” The image of Kahn came to him. “Yeh, suck till your blood runs out of their pants, but you don’t have to take it from them.” He shoved his arms out like a country wrestler, ready to meet all comers.

Mary said fiercely, “But they put it all over us.”

“You fight them.”

“They ain’t going to fall off or bust of themselves, and I don’t see no fighting going on. When Lou Callahan comes around, they’re scared skinny. Harry’s told me.”

He ignored the barb about Callahan. “I’ve raised every-

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thing. Tobacco is what I'm raisin now. It's a crop takes a long time to learn. I'm learnin. I ain't gonna hop from one thing to another. Who the hell knows what's gonna be after the war? I got a tractor to back me. This fall I'll get me a bulldozer. I got twenty-four hundred dollars worth of my own machinery, and by the time I get through I'm gonna have a farm runnin smooth as a factory."

"Pipe dream," cried Mary, clasping her hands tightly. The others were out. This was between the two of them.

"I'll have it. If the other fella won't come along, he don't have to." Moe leaned back in his chair. He had spoken.

There was an awkward silence. Mary turned her back to him and walked to the other side of the tiny room.

Charley slapped Moe on the shoulder. "Man, I believe you'll do it. Get Cooky in with you. That's one of the things been keepin Mary back. She won't leave him with the old woman, and the kid swears he'll be triple damned before he leaves the farm."

The boys went out to the car, and later in the afternoon they took the girls to a movie and treated them to ice cream.

On their way back home, mile after mile, Moe and Mary had nothing to say to each other. Grimly he attended to his driving. He knew Mary was sore; she had left him to get along the best he knew how with Anna while she had danced with Charley to the tune of a jukebox in the ice-cream saloon.

It was only when they were in Hartford, passing the great aircraft plant, that she broke the bitter silence. "You shouldn't of tried to scare me with the talk about leaving the other fella in the cold if he won't come along."

"I ain't scarin nobody. I said what I mean."

"You could of said that to me when we were alone, not with Anna and Charley. It ain't none of their business."

Moe had nothing to say in answer to that.

"Factory farm, factory farm," she repeated. "Sounds nice, like some kind of a verse over the radio, but you can't eat it or wear it. It can mean the old pump and the back-house and the flies and the kerosene lamp and a woman dragging around like a bitch dog that's just had a dozen pups."

"I ain't never treated nobody worked for me like a dog, and no woman'll be my bitch!"

She drew a deep breath, and after a while put her arm through his. Her voice was low. "How do you like Charley, dear?"

"Okay."

"But Anna—oh, Jesus, Anna! Charley wanted her before she had the baby. He was sure it was his. And now he's got her, she don't act like the lucky girl she is. She's bored to death, won't do nothing all day but read movie magazines and sleep." Mary laughed. "That's one thing about her—she can sleep. Charley comes in from the night shift about eight. Anna gets up to make breakfast, and then she goes back to bed with him. He don't mind it."

Moe looked straight ahead. "Two kids."

"But they're newlyweds."

"Actin just like two kids," he muttered.

Mary said angrily, "What a stubborn guy you are!"

"All I said was they're two kids."

She shook her head in despair and laughed. "Look who's talking! The old man. Look at my old man."

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CHAPTER XXIII

WHILE MRS. MILLER REMAINED AWAY WITH ROSE, MARY helped with the cooking and cleaning. She looked after the old man, paying more attention to him than to Moe. She acted as if she were already the woman of the house.

Moe liked the way she took hold of things. What got him was that she had a mind of her own and grabbed every chance to show it. Life should have gone on smoothly with Mrs. Miller away, but differences continued to crop up between the two. Mary backed to the handle-end the old man's plan that Moe hire another shed instead of altering the cowbarn to provide more curing space for his tobacco.

It was, Moe pointed out, the middle of August, a nice time to go looking for another shed. Other farmers were already cutting their tobacco. He hadn't an hour to lose. But the old man tried to hold him up by saying milk would become a far more important crop than tobacco because of the war, and the next year the barn might be needed for milkers.

Moe rode roughshod over his protests, broke down some of the stanchions in the barn, and over the grass rigged poles and planks. He made a new path to the barn over which the tobacco rigs could travel, and he cut the weeds and brush around it.

The weather had turned hot again, and the sweat ran down his thick arms. He finished one side of the barn, then adjusted his scythe by getting the first handle to touch his thigh and the end of the blade the tip of his stretched foot.

Mary, who had been bunching up the cut weeds, couldn't

get over how he had beaten down his father's opposition. "You sure got a way with things," she said sarcastically.

He didn't get the dig. "Been farmin long enough to know how to handle a scythe," he muttered, taking a swipe at a clump of daisies.

They were big, white-rimmed, bull's-eye daisies. Attracted by their freshness, Mary picked them up.

Moe asked: "You ain't gettin to be like Rose Kahn—every damn weed is a flower?"

She gathered more of them, put them in the shade to take home, without replying.

He cut vigorously, bringing down another bunch. "First thing is to get this cleared so there's good circulation in this barn for curin. The daisies can go to hell."

Mary jabbed the pitchfork into the ground and sat down. Wiping her forehead with the back of her hand, she said, "I don't see why your father gave in so easy."

"I don't go to him for advice about farmin." Conscious of her disapproval, he was dogged and stubborn.

She sat on a rock which he had rolled from the barn door. Her legs were spread and her dress hitched up. Catching his glance, she mechanically pulled down her dress and continued gazing speculatively at him. "I passed Kahn's number two farm. Some of his big barns have the charcoal fires burning. Soon he'll be taking down his leaves for packing. All the plantations will have a good year, but the little farmers will be lucky to pay their debts."

"I ain't worryin about no plantations. I worked on them. Half the plantation bosses don't know the difference between a sucker and a sand leaf. You're talkin about charcoal fires. The big Webster, he used southern pine stuff for

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charcets, the worst you can find. Once Kahn tried plain wood and lost a shed by fire. I had trouble in my shed last fall. Sure. Oughta get heat over 85, got only 60, and outside it was 7 above zero, but I saved my crop."

He spat on his hands, his tongue loosened. "I worked two nights and a day, but I did it. This year if them charcets is too high, maybe I'll make my own charcoal. Got plenty wood, got the brook."

Her eyes opened wide in amazement. "Mother of God, are you thinking of taking on more?"

"As much as I got to. First spring I bought the tractor, I had enough work cut out, but I handled it. I'd get up at night to mix the fertilizer, had it sowed by breakfast time, and was in the field with the wheelharrow when everybody else was just gettin started. Sortin time I'd be up till one o'clock spreadin and wettin the tobacco to get it ready for the sorters next mornin. Once I did the openin myself, tiein it in hands, sortin it right off the stalk. Years ago they had four grades—fillers, seconds, wrappers, tops. Now we got ten grades, from the sand leaves up."

Mary listened without batting an eyelash, her elbows on her knees, her broad strong chin cupped in her hands.

Something about her gaze made him uncomfortable. He started out lamely, but after a few words, struck out strong once more. "Tobacco ain't as hard as it's cracked up to be. I hanged for five rigs once and kept them busy. I hanged for my fater when I was a kid with no other help. He handed up, I put them on the lowest pole and then went up alone to the purloin plate under the roof. The old man was on the wagon. He get's pole-sick."

Mary rose. There was a tremor in her voice. "Moe

Miller, you can do it all, you know it all. I'm sick and tired of you! Your mother is dirt, your father gets pole-sick. It's about time you got wise to yourself." Picking up the daisies, she left him.

Smarting under this unexpected tongue-lashing, Moe gaped after her. Just as the vision of her body at the brook had put him at a disadvantage, so this glimpse of what was going on inside her tied him up. No one had ever spoken that way to him before. He had boasted to impress her with his iron determination to have things his own way. She had come back fighting, rocking him back on his heels.

She went into the house to give the old man a hand with the dinner. When Moe came in from the barn, she met him on the porch, the eyes under the straight brows hard and cold. He smiled self-consciously, on the defensive, but the smile was quickly wiped off his face when she asked for her pay. She wasn't coming in during the afternoon; she gave no reason.

He got her the money. "This extra is for the cookin'."

She crushed the bills in her fist. "You just can't understand anybody doing favors. Everything is Dutch treat, and the hell with the other fellow. You sure are no chip of your father!"

The bum of a sailor had charged him with not being his mother's son, she on her high horse said he wasn't his father's. With difficulty Moe restrained himself. He needed this girl. He said thickly, "We're workin tomorrow. If you ain't goin to church, there's work."

"Yeh?"

"I'm payin half a dollar more."

"Oh, you are, are you? Be careful it don't break your

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heart." Laughing derisively, she crossed the yard and took the short cut home.

Moe finished the work around the barn alone. The smell of the curing June grass wakened in him the memory of the scene when, hanging on for dear life to the mowing machine, she had passed her first test for him. She had guts, and though she had scarcely a pot to sit on she didn't take anything lying down. That is what attracted and repelled him at the same time. He had known a few women, and of these none could hold a candle to her. Wood's middle-aged housekeeper, twice her heft and strength, had made advances to him again and again. Rose would squat before him like a pullet if he'd as much as put his hand out. With all her dissatisfaction with his coarseness, with his goyish qualities, his mother waited on every move of his fearfully. Moe picked up a bit of grass, snuffed up its smell, and left the barn.

The evening was empty for him. He had allowed his few free hours to be topped and taken up too much with her. Determined to break himself of the habit, he tried to get to work, but Mary lay between him and everything he put his hand to.

He drove to the village. "The Old Harry" was closed because of the gas curfew. Rocking on the porch in his stocking feet, Herman said that Harry and Babe had seen the Packard fly by and had gone over to the plantation to ask about Hy. Herman smiled into his thick mustache. "Ain't you takin your best girl out tonight?"

Moe chewed the rag with him for a while, then he jumped into his car and took the river highway. He stopped off at a Hartford movie, which he left in the middle of the

first feature. He drove on and on toward Middletown, passing the Wangunck Meadows, full of parked cars with couples. He went into a store for cigars, and there a couple of big brown Polack girls, on a stag, made eyes at him. He turned north wearily, having driven in circles, like some fool dog after its tail.

As he rattled into the yard, Anton rose from the shadows. He was keeping Moe informed of his affair. "It's coming with that Ruby. The wolf always runs back to the forest." He went to his shack singing a holy madrigal, and upstairs a shade was pulled. His mother was back. He heard her drowsy, anxious voice, then his father reassuring her.

Moe realized that he had let himself in for something which would end only the devil knew how. In spite of his terrible determination, he had allowed that girl to get a hook into him which hurt as nothing had ever hurt before. He lay for a long while on his cot without closing an eye, staring into the darkness and sweating.

Next morning he was up late. His head was big, his thoughts were muddled. For the first time in his life he felt he didn't give a damn whether he worked or not.

Up since daybreak, Mrs. Miller had a big breakfast ready for him. Though she had lost weight, and there were hollows under her high cheekbones, she flew about the kitchen as lively as a girl of sixteen.

"Will you have more cornflakes, Moey?"

"I had plenty of that chaff."

She looked intently at him for a sign. "Aren't you feeling well? You are not eating."

"I'm all right," he muttered, puzzled by the shine in her eyes and the way her delicate hands danced around the

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dishes. What was she so happy about? Had they found that loafer at last?

She said apologetically, including the old man in her glance: "I had to go with Rose. If Hymie had a mother, it would be different. He has disappeared like a drop of water in the ocean."

"He'll show up, he'll show up," said the old man, looking tenderly at her.

Moe remembered the scene on the porch between the two. He dropped his eyes, gulped down the scalding coffee, and pushed his chair back.

"Moey, stay a minute. Please. We were in New York and Boston and New Haven. We stayed one night with the Tannenbaums. Joe has a wonderful farm with his son-in-law. He can teach us how two families live together. But there is nothing like being home again."

Last night, on her arrival, she had put the lights on in every room and had swept through them, touching her furniture and pictures. "Iser," she said, "all week I longed only to be home. Tell me. Am I getting old?"

"The winter apple tastes sweetest," said the old man, taking her hand.

Moe left them. He made a bee-line for his car. He must corner that red mink. He must know where in hell she stood. If she didn't give him the right word, he would find cutting hands elsewhere. He must get rid of this deadweight and get down to his job once and for all.

Blocking the road below the bank was Harry's car. Big-bosomed Babe leaned over the wheel as he climbed out of his Dodge. "Good morning, young man. Herman said you was over last night."

Moe nodded curtly.

"Any news this morning about Hy?"

He did not answer, for just then the door opened. Mary, her mother, and Cooky came out. Mary stopped in surprise. Recovering her composure, she said coldly, "Hullo."

Her mother grinned and pulled her dress down over her great haunches. She whispered to Mary. The girl bridled up, answered her in a sharp undertone, and then said out loud, "I told you I wasn't suckering today."

"I know."

She did not move; she was going to make it damned hard for him.

Moe walked up the bank. To hell with this bushing around. He'd put it straight from the shoulder.

Babe herded Mrs. Foley and Cooky into her car. "Mary, I'll wait up the road a piece."

Moe cast a thankful look in her direction. The girl remained under the catalpa tree, a yellow ribbon in her hair and the pearl cross on her chest. "Hell," he blurted out in his confusion, "we been actin like kids. Cuttin time's comin." He wound up and fired. "Ain't no use goin on this way."

The color flowed from her strong face.

"I mean you're a girl a man can talk to. You got sense, Mary." He paused, and then his tongue, too thick and big for his mouth, galloped off with him. "I mean we can figure it out. If a man means business, he wants to be sure where the other guy stands. It ain't but right. You know it ain't but right." He drew his hand across his sweaty face. He had never labored harder. Groping with his hand, he found his tobacco bag, held it tight, and slowly his confidence returned.

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She said, "Why don't you say what you mean?"

"I'll get it out," he said a little helplessly. "I mean when a girl's in the same house with a fella, she's his wife, you got her when you want her."

She caught her breath, a heavy shudder ran through her.

"Cuttin's here. We're wastin time. By cripes, everything's balled up."

Her face grew paler and paler, and, realizing that he had said something wrong, he hurried to add. "I left Anton suckerin alone. We can get it straightened out, Mary. By God, yeh, and get it over."

She took a step toward him, her eyes whipping him with scorn and a great anger. "Moe Miller, you'll never change. Suckering, cutting! If it ain't work, you're in a grand rush to put something in a girl's belly didn't get there down her throat!" With that she hurried down the bank and got into Harry's car.

Moe was left alone under the tree.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BIG KAHN TOURING CAR WAS DRAWN UP CLOSE TO THE house. Hearing his father's unusually loud voice, Moe entered.

Max sat on one side of the kitchen table, his father on the other, and his mother, in a flowing blue kimono, sat between them. She, who was so exact in her cleanliness, had

let the breakfast dishes go ungathered. Flies were crawling in the cups.

Mrs. Miller glanced at Moe's hurt, perplexed face, and, with an uneasy twist of her shoulder, she stared through the screen door into the yard. Pleating the kimono nervously, she focussed her attention on the two men.

Miller had seldom been so wrought up. His coarse grizzled mustache quivered as he rapped out, "It isn't the few dollars, Max, as I told you last year when you raised the price of tickets for the holy days without consulting anybody. You, as the cemetery committee chairman, have no right to tax us again unless the rest of us vote yes. Are we some of your Polish help that you can boss us?"

Max was sitting on a pile of cushions; his Philistine disease was troubling him again. His dusty black hat was pushed over his big dome. He yawned with a cracking of the jaws.

"It isn't the few dollars. All we talk about these days is the war. Everything we Jews have is in it, but do we understand what this war is about?"

"What are you *kockin* about? Maybe now you will lecture me about democracy, shamocracy? Cancer, sman-sheer, so long as we have our health. Ach, you *melamid*, you teacher, you!"

"I will show you what we are *kockin* about."

Mrs. Miller poked out her dimpled elbows. "Iser, must you express yourself that way?"

"If *kockin* will make our friend understand, yes! Max had no right to raise the tax without asking the rest of us. Are we in Germany now? The stones of Warsaw are soaked with the blood of Jews, villages in Lithuania are

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piled with corpses, people are dying for the right to be listened to."

"What has one thing to do with another?" burst out Max. "You are a Jew who makes mountains out of flyspots."

"Maybe I am a *pintele* Yid, but you had no right."

Max said irritably, "I've put enough into that synagogue. God is plenty overhead for me."

Again Mrs. Miller broke in. "You know very well, Iser, that without Max the synagogue will stand on hen's feet."

"If it is to be supported by only one man, let it collapse."

Kahn grunted to the horrified woman, "Now I see where Moe got his wild tongue."

"Keep our children out of this, Max," Miller said. "If we bring them in, woe to us. Each of us will find humps on our backs bigger than the mountains you speak of. I say again if it is to make better Jews of us, let the synagogue collapse."

"Iser, are you a *goy*, some kind of a peasant?" demanded his wife. She threw an indignant glance at Moe.

Motionless, Moe leaned against the doorpost. During the first part of the conversation, all he had heard was Mary's voice ringing out and had again seen her flashing eyes. Then, sensing that a fight was brewing in which Max might be told once and for all where to get off, siding wholeheartedly with the old man, he forgot the girl. He recognized that his mother's charge of peasant was also hurled against him.

"I'm a peasant. Good." The old man's sense of humor got the better of him. "At one time everything I did showed I was a peddler, then I worked myself up to a *melamid*. Now the style has changed—I am a peasant. God. We can

learn from the peasants. Steve Foley was a peasant, an honest man, a good neighbor. I remember how, in the middle of tobacco cutting, he learned there was a mouse in the barn making a hole in a sack of grain. Forgotten his tobacco, everything, to find that mouse. That was a peasant, but he was a better man than some of our good Jews."

Max said with a grimace, "Now he is going to grind more horseradish for us."

"Max, you remember how the peasant Karupka was marched through the streets of our village wearing a necklace of stinking old fish heads because he stole a pickerel from my poor mother's stand. We thought that was right, forgetting the poverty, the life bitter as worm cabbage that the peasants shared with us. Do you remember how the peasants would eat a herring—guts, tail, the water in which it was soaked, everything? Don't I remember the peasant who served the Czar with me under a lieutenant, a beast of an anti-Semite. In the maneuvers crossing the river Terek, the little lieutenant leaped on his back, and our peasant promptly dumped him into the river. We knew that he had done that for us also, but we stood by while he was lashed till the blood flowed. Now the sons of the same peasants are dying, fighting the worst enemy in all our history. Why should I be ashamed to be called a peasant?"

"Why are you banging a teapot?" asked Kahn coolly. "You are just like Moe here. I said he shouldn't worry about that red *shicksa*, and you should have seen him."

"Max, that girl is as good as our own children!"

"Pip, pip," said Max sarcastically. "How we defend these peasants, these Jew-fressers, letting them crawl over our

mugs. Greetings from the two-cent politicians in Congress, greetings from the Callahans."

Moe shot a savage glance at his mother, who, in her wild anxiety not to offend Max, yanked at the old man's sleeve. He said harshly, "I got work to do. I want somethin to eat, not listen to talk, talk, talk."

With a frightened cry, she hurried to the pantry. Coming back, she saw her husband pull himself together and lead Max to the car.

The two old friends eyed each other warily, and Max said in his cool provoking way, his tight lipless mouth working over his teeth, "Something's happened to you, Iser."

Miller flushed. "I have a son, and it's taken me all these years to learn it." He broke off, looked Max straight in the eye, and said sorrowfully, "The lightest command is to let the mother bird go, and the hardest one is to honor one's father and mother. Why do we make that command so hard for our children to obey? Ach, Max, and why should we be quarreling before one son when we are so concerned over the other?"

Kahn's cool, scornful look vanished. "He can break his neck!"

Miller spoke softly to turn away his wrath. "We are getting old, the Gehenna leaves are on us, Max, but where is our wisdom?"

Kahn slid his rump gingerly on to the seat of the touring car. "I must go back and see what Rose is doing. Now, in the middle of the busy season, everything is *koktacho*. As for that son of mine, I am rid of him, like a piece of dung, with blood and pain, but rid of him. And you, watch for

your own. Do not be a fool like I was. Give it to him over the head!"

The car roared away. The old man stepped into the house. Hardly had he crossed the threshold, when Mrs. Miller fell on him, crying out how first Moe beat up Hymie, and now the father, learning from him, was fighting with the finest, the truest, the most devoted of friends.

"Let me be, Esther," said the old man wearily. "There is nothing wrong to fight for the right. What is wrong is to be a fool and a gabber. With all my talk, talk, talk, Max drives off, and the tax remains."

Moe rose with a morose grin, clapped his engineman's cap on his head, and walked out, leaving her speechless at the way father and son had begun running together.

All during his work in the field, Moe saw again the blaze of anger in Mary's eyes and her bewildering behavior. He had been attracted by her honesty, but she had tricks like the rest of them. They started bossing you, took you with one hand, in a sweat to plug their wants, and then with the other hand slapped you for doing so. What the hell did she expect of him? Another girl would have jumped at her chance; she went around with her tail on her shoulder. The way his mother did. Then he remembered with grim satisfaction how his father had stood up against the combination. Every once in a while the old man showed he had spunk. And again the scene under the catalpa tree came back to him.

Moe tried to shake his mind free as he hooked the suckers off. He began with the crowns and worked down to the sand leaves, his hands buried among the broad skirts of the plants, his feet crushing the broken stems and useless leaves.

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His hands were heavy and slow as if they were boxed and boarded up. There was an ache and a gnawing in his throat.

He was buried among the plants in the middle of the rich green field when a distant shout made him cock his head. He straightened up painfully, his hands loaded with suckers. The sun was below the pines in the pheasant wood. He could see nothing. He bent again. There was another faint cry, then a piercing whistle.

Cooky was perched on the rocks in the line fence. He leaped down like a goat and sped towards him.

"Watch it," roared Moe, moving carefully to meet him.

The kid jumped up and down, his face white, the twisted mouth pulling at the air. "Beauty, the little beagle, and Hy! He's there in the woods." Cooky's eyes were glassy with horror. "Hy is there."

Moe followed the kid, broke into a run. He plunged through the high bushes, across the clearing into the knee-high wild grass, around the swamp where the cattails clustered. Above the swamp the hawks cried.

Running abreast of him, Cooky heaved and choked. "Harry said yesterday he thinks he heard the beagle, maybe somethin was wrong. I was comin down to see you. Mary, she couldn't sit it out in church, won't go to no picnic, give the old woman a hell of a scoldin for tellin her again how to get under you. What you been doin to her, you big bastard?" Angrily he dug his elbows into his ribs and blew. "I made the short cut, and that little beagle bitch run out and chased me."

Now they saw the Cadillac 12, the famous jeep. It must have crashed through from the other end of the wagon track which branched into Beelzebub Wood. In the rear

seat were Hy's constable hat and nightstick. On the other side of the jeep lay two bodies.

Sprawled on the grass, her long arms out, was a handsome mulatto girl. Near her cheek, where a brassy earring hung, was a little black hole.

The kid gasped. Moe saw his round staring eyes. He got between him and the girl, and drew the skirt over her knees. Then he stepped toward Hy. As he bent over, Cooky cried out a warning.

From the bushes darted the spotted beagle. Moe kicked at the snarling, half starved dog. It got him by the leg. As he grabbed the bitch, she turned and sank her teeth into the ham of his hand.

"Don't," begged Cooky. "She's a prize. She stuck to her boss."

The bitch ripped Moe's hand. Moe finally tore her away and hurled her into the grass. She went around and around as if her back were broken.

Cooky sagged to his knees, and then keeled over. Moe caught him in his arms. He lay inert for a moment, stirred, and moaned.

Moe carried him to the car. The key was in it. He yanked out the choke. The engine coughed, and the fly-wheel clattered. The jeep started backfiring and banging.

Moe roared through the woods as if he were driving a tractor, uprooting bush and sapling. The sick boy beside him tried to rise and fell back sobbing. Through the trees there was a flash—the state trooper's car with Harry on the running board speeding toward them.

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CHAPTER XXV

MOE FOUND HIMSELF INVOLVED IN THE MESS UP TO HIS neck; he had to bear the brunt of the questioning and snooping. Reporters from the city papers packed the yard and sat in the Genesareth hut to get the story. When they got through with it, it was something altogether different. One paper played up the Pudims' angle to give the world the impression that Hy had met foul play because he was tracking down Nazis, and printed pictures glorifying the hunter, the constable, the ball pitcher, the flower of American youth. Another paper attacked the Congressional committee investigating the labor situation, charging that it was responsible for bringing in carloads of wild Negroes from the South, and warning farmers of Lou Callahan. No paper mentioned the mulatto girl.

The funeral was one of the most elaborate in the history of the valley. The tiny Jewish cemetery had never been so packed. The leading plantation owners, buyers, politicians attended. The road for a mile was black with cars.

Supported by Miller and her Uncle George, Rose wept quietly. Max wore a harassed and a menacing, calculating look in his red-rimmed eyes, as if some one were going to pay for this. When the coffin was lowered, Mrs. Miller fainted.

Moe stood to one side, sweating in his tight blue suit. After his mother was revived by Dr. Blumenthal, he pushed his way through the crowd. He caught a glimpse of Mary with Dominick, his wife, and their girl in the braces whom Hy had often taken.

Moe's Dodge was parked down the road some distance. On the way, raising the dust churned up by hundreds of wheels, he heard his name. Herman and Babe Horton were standing near their car.

"Seen Harry?" asked Babe, whose face was swollen from weeping.

Moe shook his head.

Herman said, "I never see so many cars."

"I never see so much fuss about buryin a turd," said Moe sourly.

Herman's thick brows knitted, and Babe burst out violently, "Moe Miller, for a Jewish lad, you sure got no heart. I don't wonder Mary says you got to be taken with a long-handled fork!"

Herman was just as much under the rosy thumb of this hearty, domineering woman as Harry. He placed his paw on her arm. "Babe, Babe, they hear you all over the country."

"Serves him right if he loses that girl, fool kid!"

Hunching his shoulders indifferently, Moe left them. Tobacco leaves were cracking, ripe for cutting, and here he was fooling his time away. Some of the Iron Dukes were at the cemetery, and he might have asked if they were willing to work, he'd pay a dollar more than the plantations. He tightened his fist and winced; the beagle had done a job on it. What in hell was it that made dogs and women go crazy over that Genghis? He couldn't forget how Mary had taken it when, carrying Cooky into the house, he had broken the news to her. He had written her off his book, but the way she had paled and the thought of her shedding a tear over Hy cut deep.

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His parents were among the last to leave the cemetery. His mother fainted again, and Dr. Blumenthal accompanied them back to the farm. He ordered her to stay in bed. The old man nursed her day and night.

For years Mrs. Miller had been a second and over-indulgent mother to Hy. He had returned her attention with real affection, always kissing her when visiting, and was more of the image she had dreamed of than the grimy, morose son who, even as a child, had shrugged off her efforts to love him. Hy's death was a terrible blow to her. It shattered her illusions, and her conscience tortured her because she had not kept her word, given to Mrs. Kahn during her last illness, that she would help steer this wild boy straight. It was the scandal and the disgrace, however, which made her suffer most.

"Israel, I cannot believe it about that girl. Some one must have dragged her into the woods to disgrace him, just as the dog was dragged into the synagogue. It must be that Pudims."

"Now you go believing old wives' tales."

"A Negro wench. If it had only been——"

Wearily the old man repeated, "Why are you letting it eat you? It has happened, it has happened."

"But a Negro——"

"A woman is a woman."

"How can you talk that way, Israel?" The veins stood out in her thin neck. "You, a Jew, to talk that way?"

"A Jew, but also a man."

The scuffle of feet was heard on the porch. It was time to set the table. The old man had been doing all the cooking for Moe and Anton, doing it cheerfully, saying to himself

with a grimace that if he couldn't be a man, at least he could be a woman of a sort.

His wife turned her face to the wall. He went downstairs. It was Mrs. Foley and Mary. They had come to pay their respects to the sick. Gratefully, he showed them up to the bedroom.

The three men were eating when the visitors came down. Mrs. Foley's blowzy face was downcast, but Mary neither by word nor action showed that anything amiss had happened.

"Hearty appetite," said Mrs. Foley elaborately.

"Come eat with us," called the old man heartily. "Moe, bring over a chair."

Mary shook her head and smiled faintly when Moe brought over the chair. Sitting down again, he bent his head to spoon up the soup, and she went into the yard.

Anton was squirming around to get Mrs. Foley's eye. Her glance passed over him. "It's darn hard, ain't it, Mr. Miller? Mary ain't doin much now. She offers to come and clean and cook till Mrs. Miller gets on her feet. She give us a hand, and we want to pay back." She came up behind Moe's chair. "She turn us down flat."

Miller coughed to hide his embarrassment. "She has confidence in my cooking. They have stomachs of iron, my son and our good hired man. I make beet greens. It tastes like somebody's wash, but they eat it and grow fat."

"They're the kind of men a woman likes to have around," said Mrs. Foley sweetly. She walked to the spotless pantry, peeked in, and nodded approvingly. She was wearing a yellow dress which kept pulling up over her hips. She gave

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it a tug and let her roving eye fall on Moe. "I see you begin cuttin."

Out in the yard Mary called her impatiently.

Anton gulped down a mouthful of beets. "It's slow, Ruby. Dog's blood, there is no help."

"We're in the market for work."

Mary called again: "Ma, will you please let people eat in peace? I'm going."

"If you need us you know where we hang out. See you again," the departing Mrs. Foley said in her deep, brassy voice.

Anton grabbed his hat and pursued her. Moe rose to watch the little flying Pole. Steps pattered down the stairs. Mrs. Miller swept into the room.

"Esther!"

She thrust the old man aside, dropped into a chair, and in her agitation began crumbling bread crumbs into little worms.

The wild breathing, the distended nostrils were signs of the coming storm. Moe leaned against the door with one hand against the post. Through the screen he could see Anton returning with his tail between his legs.

The old man brought her a cup of tea and hovered solicitously over her. "There. I'm caught whichever way I turn, like the two Jews in the tavern, like the lost tribes on the other side of the Sanbation. Six days the river roars but on the seventh, when it is quiet, one cannot cross because of the Sabbath. Here I want to go out to help Moe, but—"

Moe said grimly, "I don't need no help, pa. She needs it."

"It wouldn't be so bad if I could prepare a good meal. It's a shame. After all, Anton is a working man, and he must

eat. Now the *Panna Matka* has been so good as to offer to help."

"I will not have her in the house!" Mrs. Miller cried in a frenzy.

Moe took out his bag and, with his eyes on her, brought the tobacco scraps to his mouth.

"Rose is coming to stay as soon as she finishes the mourning. I don't need that *shicksa* here."

Moe shifted his quid. "When it comes to cookin for the help, I got somethin to say. I pay for the board."

"I will not have her in the house!" Red spots flamed on her high cheekbones. "You behaved at the funeral as if a dog were being buried, not your own blood. Say what you want about Hy, he never brought such a creature into the house. If you want to have her in the woods and ditches, have her, but not here!"

She tore out of the old man's arms, stumbled over the long skirts of her kimono and, catching hold of the table, shrieked hysterically, "God in heaven, will you stop those vultures with the crosses round their necks?"

"Moe!" commanded the old man, showing him his hot stern face, "not a word."

Moe thrust out his lips and with a scowl walked out into the fresh air. He spat in deep disgust and stared over the clean, green fields. From the shed came the whirling of the bicycle grindstone—Anton sharpening the tobacco knives.

Expelling his tobacco explosively, Moe stepped so hard down from the porch that he jarred himself. By God, this was dragging long enough. He strode across the fields, overtaking the women at the point where the track entered the woods. Mrs. Foley saw him first. With a smile in her impu-

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dent, knowing eyes, she flipped her cigarette into the air and butted into the brush, leaving him alone with Mary.

The girl had her arms full of wild flowers. He moved toward her with his hook of a nose high and a pucker in his burned forehead. "I want to talk to you," he said.

"Ain't no law against that." She spotted a stump in the shade of a cherry tree. She settled herself on it as if she were having her picture taken.

Moe reached for his tobacco, but decided against chewing. Not a word out of her. Once more she was making it goddamned hard, sitting there with those weeds to her snub nose and the shadow of her blunt lashes on her cheeks. He looked down at her feet, his eyes strayed to her parted legs, and his throat caught and ached.

She asked in a soft voice, seriously, "Think you can afford to waste all this time? Your plants are ripe, leaves are cracking."

"To hell with the tobacco!"

Her mouth opened wide. Her lips curled into a faint smile, and she put the flowers into her lap.

"Cuttin can wait. Look, I need a girl to do the cookin. My mother's on her ear again. This time she don't have her way."

Mary said dully, "If there's a girl needed, that's up to your mother."

"By God, it ain't!"

"Sorry I can't help you. It's kind of late. We left Cooky alone."

In utter bewilderment, he watched her get up and walk off with a friendly smile. In the distance the brush crackled. Hell, if it wasn't one mother, it was the other. He saw his

plan smashed, the beams falling on his head. He caught up with Mary and gripped her by the arm from behind.

"You hurt!" she cried in pain.

He shook her. "I'm speakin English. I mean what I say. You worked for me. You done good."

"Thank you," she answered with a trace of the old mockery in her voice. She freed herself. "Is this the big boss hiring me?"

"I ain't hirin you."

"Then what?" she demanded impatiently. Her face had hardened, and her eyes were sharp and clear and level.

If a man could yank his tongue out, then perhaps his mouth would not be hot and dry, stuffed to choking. "You're good in the house, you're good in the field. We'd get along, Mary."

She let out her breath. "Are you proposing to me, Moe?"

He blustered. "I don't get on my knees for nobody. I'm askin you."

She dropped her eyes, and when she raised them they were full of tears. Now what had he said?

"Do you know what you're asking?" she said in a low voice.

He considered her question for a moment. "Sure, I know. Let's get it over, Mary. Won't do no harm tomorrow," and then, feeling that he was pressing her too hard, he added, "If it ain't too fast. Aw, cripes, any time that suits you."

"You ought to let your father and mother know."

"I'll take care of that."

She stared at him through her wet lashes. "You ought to."

"I said I'd take care of it," he repeated stubbornly.

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She gave a deep sigh. "But there's you and Anton short-handed. The crop is ripe."

"I'll manage. It'll only be a coupla days. Girls like to have some time for gettin things ready."

"Thanks."

He looked closely at her to see if she were teasing, and then he saw that her flowers had fallen to the ground. He picked them up and handed them to her. She waited. When he made no other move, she turned around and walked away.

Uncertainty crept up in him. "See you tonight," he called out.

She bent her head and hastened her steps.

Moe remained rooted in the spot, feeling as empty as if he had been gutted. With a start, he remembered he had not kissed her. He hoisted up his shoulders. Hell, there was plenty of time for that.

CHAPTER XXVI

MARY SAT BESIDE MOE, HER STRONG HANDS IN HER LAP, AND an expression difficult to make out, a gleam now and then, lighting up her eyes. She was wearing a tan dress and tan pumps with low heels, and tied to the back of her hair, which she wore long, there was a tiny green ribbon of about the size of the butterflies that hung around the kitchen garden. Her red hair had been set. Moe, who had been in town with her before, had spent the most uncom-

fortable hour of his life in the waiting room of a beauty parlor while she had sat under the helmet.

She had said little since they had left her home. The broad forehead, which met the world foursquare, was smooth. Only her hands, the blunt brown fingers tightening around each other, showed what was going on inside her. Moe looked at her again with the corner of his eye.

She raised her hands with a smile. "Can't do nothing with them, Moey. Anna creams hers and wears gloves at night, but I can't bear anything on mine. If I soaked them in hot water and soap for a year, they'd still stay freckled and rough."

Moe said brusquely, "I ain't worried about your hands, your feet, or nathin else."

"You give me the once over that time by the brook, and I passed. Is that it?"

His lips twitched. He nailed his eyes on the road ahead.

"So you think I'm okay?"

"I ain't kickin."

"I'm beginning to think, Moey, you like me." She moved closer to him.

He remained silent, for he was a man in deadly earnest about the business in hand. A man on his way to his wedding cannot stop to kid or make love. But as he drove along, he could not help taking in the life along the road.

Farmers were cutting in many places—rigs, spearing horses, tractors, and working hands were in the fields. Plantation trucks, loaded with canvas baskets holding leaves, roared by on their way to the sheds where the women sewed them on the laths for hanging. In the outside leaf, which he observed closely, nowhere did he see tobacco to

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match his. The last few days he had brought in some rigs, but he couldn't throw himself into the work. In a few hours his uneasiness would be over; he would be able to fling himself headlong back into the cutting. There was only one hitch—he had broken completely with Kahn and, knowing how the buyers hung together, he would have one hell of a fight selling his tobacco. A stubborn pucker ran across his forehead.

Mary waited for him to talk, wondering what had brought the furrow into his face. She said, "Only thing I don't like is your father and mother don't know. It's wrong. We ain't having it in church, and so they could of come along."

When he had appeared at seven o'clock, as if for a day's work, she had still been asleep. She had been up late the night before getting ready. His voice had awakened her. She had called him into her room, making him sit, awkward and flustered, on her bed. While Cooky had run in and out with her curling iron, she had laid plans for the day. First, they would go to Hartford for their license, avoiding a religious ceremony so as to make it easier for the Millers, and having Harry Horton marry them. Moe did not understand why they needed all that fuss, but after grumbling he had yielded.

A rough spot in the road bounced the old Dodge, throwing them together. Mary rested her head on his shoulder and studied the big swarthy face with the peculiarly short, thin upper lip and the sullen black eyes. She had got him to crop his hair short, but what a job it had been to have him wear his new brown suit instead of the ill-fitting blue serge which looked as if he had picked it up second hand. She

said under her breath, "That's the only thing, Moey. I'd have my family along, but if yours ain't, it don't seem right to have mine neither."

"Wouldn't waste no time worryin about it," he muttered.

"You're making it a real cinch for me." She put her fingers to her throat and touched the little pearl-crusted cross. She had asked him about it, and he had said it wasn't any of his damned business what she wore. "You know—" she patted the bulge of the arm cased in the brown sleeve—"you know there's none of the Jew in you. It ain't natural. It ain't right."

"What the hell am I then?" he snorted. "A Canuck, a Swede? I never hide it from nobody. Sure, I'm a Jew. Ain't ashamed of it, don't go blowin no horn about it. A fella is what he is."

She listened to this with a quiet smile. She put her hand to his shoulder to straighten the collar of his coat.

They arrived at the city hall and got their license without a hitch. Strangely enough, Mary remembered at the last moment that she had more shopping to do; she needed a wedding nightgown, she explained, although she had spent a whole day earlier in the week in the stores. Moe waited in the car in a metered parking space. She took her sweet time, and he had to put an extra coin into the meter.

When she appeared, he bore down on her, but she crossed his lips with her finger. Putting her arm through his, she steered him into a florist shop, where he shelled out for flowers no prettier than the bull's-eye daisies on the farm. "Moe," she confessed, "I'm so hungry I can hardly walk. If you don't feed me soon, I won't be able to go through with the wedding." She pulled him into a high-

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toned restaurant, where she did the ordering. While they were having coffee, she opened one of the parcels. "Stinkadoras for you." It was a box of Hartford Life broadleaf cigars.

On their way to Horton's, she insisted on driving, and went up the west side of the river to cross at the Locks. Her laughter, her spirits finally restored Moe's good humor. She kissed him. "Now I see I won't have to live on crab all my life." He took it easy, puffing his cigar, enjoying her liveliness, the efficiency with which she handled the car, all the bright new angles of herself; and he thought here was a grown woman who, when you gave her just a little head, acted no older than the girl in the picture Mary had given him, showing her wearing her Communion dress. With this pep and breeziness, she should last a good long time. Only when the car took a turn and a field came into view did he forget about her for a moment, and the longing to be in his overalls swept over him.

They pulled into the village during the afternoon. Harry was away. Babe was in the kitchen drawing pies out of the oven, and the girls who were in the parlor rushed out with squeals, closing doors behind them. Duked out fit to kill, young Harry stood in the doorway baring his buck teeth in an embarrassed grin. He said in his blubbery way, "Harry'll be back soon. He got a call for the towin car."

Moe said in disgust, "We coulda got this over this mornin'."

Hot-faced Babe bustled around Mary, admiring her outfit. "Can't wait, Moey?"

"Ain't that," he muttered in confusion.

Mary looked insulted, burst out laughing, and with the

girls squealing after her, dashed upstairs. Big-hipped young Harry crowed and ran after them. The floor thumped. They roared and bellowed upstairs.

Moe went out, not seeing the humor in all that foolishness. He stared back suspiciously, and then picked up a rake with a broken handle and whittled it down to prevent someone getting splinters. He looked at the chicken coops; because of the war, Harry was doing a little farming again, raising broilers. Finding his hands weighing heavily at his sides, Moe was on his way to the shop when he heard Mary.

Running across the lawn, she bumped wildly into him, staggering him. "Harry phoned. He'll be back soon. Let's go down to the river."

"We'll be hangin around here till Christmas!"

"You're getting married only once, Mr. Miller. You make the most of it!" She slapped him lightly across the mouth and pulled him toward the pasture that led to the river.

Arm in arm, they watched the river. Moe took out his tobacco bag, but Mary snatched it away. He caught her before she could scamper away. She twisted and turned helplessly. "I'll give it back if you promise no chewing until tomorrow. I don't want to share you with no broadleaf tonight."

He bent her arm, hurting her, and as she cried out he took her, kissing her cheeks, her lips, her hair and eyes. She pushed him away, panting, her fingers digging into his chest. Pinning her hands back, he led her toward the boat landing. Mary got behind him, caught the back of his legs with her knee so that he stumbled. Before he could recover his balance, she was flying toward the wood, turning once to thumb her nose.

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Roaring, "You little bitch," he tried to head her off. She waited until he was almost upon her, and then slipped past him, her red hair streaming in the breeze. She fled into the wood.

They came out together some time later, walking slowly. They reached a knoll in the pasture and turned for another look at the slow-moving, peaceful Connecticut. On the other shore the shadows of the tobacco warehouses blurred softly in the water. Downstream, an angler's boat made a wedge, and the late breeze ruffled the surface like a jack-plane going against the grain. Swallows, flocking already for the flight south, twittered and circled in the thickening dusk.

As they came out through the pasture gate, they heard a commotion on the lawn. Cars were parked in the driveway. Moe stopped. Mary giggled and held him tightly by the arm. "It's only our wedding guests, Moe."

A shout. Lights went on all over the house. Moe drew back, but Herman and Charley had him surrounded. Harry said, "Carry him in, gents. Don't have mercy on the man. He thought he and his could get hitched like a pair of field mice. We've put it over on him, by the grace of God."

Out ran Mrs. Foley, powdered like a sack of meal, kissed her daughter and embraced Moe with the strength of a man. She was followed by Anna. Cooky was there, too, pinch-faced and pale, wearing his cutaway cap and elastic bands around his sleeves. "Shake, Big Stuff." He said it with a scowl because he had not forgiven Moe for his treatment of the beagle. Trying to squeeze Moe's hand, he hurt his own. He turned to Herman. "Hey, Dutch, the old woman give me rolled oats this mornin, it made me

weak as a cat. Give us some of that Green Lantsman chewin tobacco of yours."

Towering above everybody, sweating profusely, Moe backed into a corner against the wall where, side by side, two frames hung—one holding a card showing that Harry was an honorary member of the Burlington Liars' Club, the other containing the check for \$2.63 which the tobacco association had sent him for three crops.

Babe plumped down at the piano, and young Harry plucked his guitar.

Harry raised his long lean hand. "Ladies and gents, it is kind of late. Maybe it's later than you think, and the blissful couple don't need this ceremony any more, being man and wife already before the Lord." He bent a severe glance on Mary, who was coming into the room from freshening up.

The girl blushed and took Moe's hand. He looked at her curiously. She had shown him a few tricks today, had a bag of them, and it flashed through his mind that she would break fence and run him ragged ever so often. He felt her warm rough hand snuggle into his, soften, and lie still. His anger and discomfort vanished. A shoot of expectancy stirred in him. He pulled back his shoulders and looked at Harry.

Someone began singing at the rear door. The wedding guests parted. A window banged in the parlor, which was crowded with tables. Herman came in with Anton Bartasus.

A tobacco sucker with its pink flower stuck into his greasy hat band, Anton reeled toward the couple. "Sonof-a-gun," he cried, "I tell Harry, come in and to talk to old man. I tell old man, 'Moey be gettin married, marryin a

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lila Panna Matka. Come, I take you, Old Testament. Take the mistress, too.’”

Mrs. Foley caught him by the suspenders, but he pushed her away. He felt strongly his obligations to his friends, the Millers. Here was the wedding of their only child, who had befriended him, drunk and sober, times too numerous to be counted. It was his duty to say something which would make up in a small way for the absence of the dear parents. He tried to recall songs the family had sung at Passover when he had sat at the table, chants which he had heard under the synagogue window. “‘The kid, the kid,’” he cried. “‘*Kad Gadyoh.*’” Then he began the Polish-Hebrew song about the angel—“‘Does the tailor live here?’” Neither was satisfactory. It must be something holy, something with meaning. His face brightened. Cocking his thumb and waving it, he cried out in his cracked voice, “‘Tell me, rabbi, what is bread to the poor? Oh, the poor, the poor.’”

He was carried off to the kitchen, where he quietened down over a drink.

Moe whispered to Mary, half in anger, half in admiration at the way she had managed the whole business. “You little, little mick!”

“What’s wrong?” she asked innocently.

“Wait till we’re alone.”

“I can hardly wait.” Her eyes held his, and they were steady and clear and happy.

Harry said apologetically, “I did my best, kid.”

Mary patted him on the arm. “Thanks, Harry.”

Moe shifted his weight impatiently.

Harry puffed his chest and cleared his throat. “I believe

we are about ready." He gazed around at the guests and then let his blue chips of eyes rest affectionately on the couple before him. "You've got your license. Everything is legal and proper, above board, before the law." He mouthed the usual questions, turning from the wide-eyed girl to the swarthy offhorse of a boy. Then pulling a long face, trying to wring as much out of the occasion as possible, sparing neither himself nor his friends, he raised himself on his toes, and the words came solemnly and with authority from him, as he knotted them man and wife.

CHAPTER XXVII

RETURNING FROM THE FOLEYS', WHERE HE HAD SPENT HIS wedding night, Moe took the wagon track through the woods. On coming into the open among his tobacco, he heard the water pump banging away. There was no other sound in the yard or house. He went into his room and got into his overalls. His father entered.

The old man's broad shoulders were stooped, and deep lines of pain were driven into his face. He smiled. "Good morning, son."

Moe said good morning.

"How is—how is the little *Panna Matka*?"

Feet planted wide apart, Moe faced him belligerently. "She's all right."

"Ah, your mother. Are you not going upstairs to say a few words to her?"

"No."

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"But your mother!"

Moe met his eye. "Pa, look, I'm busy. I got no time for fits."

The old man flinched. "My son, we did not dance at your wedding. Think. I have only one child, and I did not dance at his wedding, my son."

Moe saw the look of suffering on the old man's face, and he said, "Do you think I wanted it this way? Mary asked you and ma to come. Do you want me to crawl on my belly for her?"

"No." A faint smile touched his cracked lips. "Not on your belly, but on your feet like a man. There are things hard for her to understand. Go, Moe."

Moe flushed and hitched up his shoulders stubbornly. He took his bucket of tobacco knives and went to the porch. There he stopped and turned. "I'll be in the tobacco if you need me for somethin. I'm stayin over at Mary's till we find a place."

The old man was stunned. In the yard, sparrows, busy in his Genesareth hut, chirped, and a cicada shrilled like a grindstone in one of the trees. He shook himself, took off his spectacles and wiped them vigorously until he had regained complete control of his feelings.

He prepared breakfast for his shrunken family. He served Esther in her room. She ate very little and complained peevishly because he had not called the Kahns again to inquire how they were. Her eyes filled with tears. He knew she was waiting for him to say something about their son. Later, he ate alone, and the food lodged in his throat like straw.

About noon the Packard clattered into the yard. Rose

hurried upstairs. Max remained in the car. Miller went to greet him, with his hands out, a smile of pity on his careworn face.

Max ignored the hand. "I see your circumcised one has begun his cutting."

"Yes, he began last week."

"I mean cutting his *shicksa*."

The old man winced at that thrust.

"And that Harry Horton, he must stick himself into this, that Yankee piece of dung. I'll fix that two-cent politician."

The old man pulled himself together and began in a placating tone of voice, "Max, I think——"

"You think! Yes, you think I'm a *shmendrik*, a know-nothing like your Talmudical student. He sees his bride on the bed and flees because he is afraid to crawl into that from which he came."

"I have never accused you of being a student," said Miller. "Harry came to me to ask if I thought he was doing wrong. I said no, not if Moe wants it that way. Moe set his head, and it will take a thousand horses to pull an idea from his head once it's in there." Miller had no apologies to make for that son of his as he faced, in this severest test of their friendship, the grizzled and streaked grower, the he-goat who had had his way so often among the flock.

There was a knock at an upper window. Rose beckoned to her father to come up. The stubby hand with its hard black nails rapped the steering wheel. "You talk and talk and talk, Reb Iser, defending these Hortons and dragging these Callahans into our synagogues. To the old troubles I must add new. I am hiring children without working

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papers, and the labor department threatens to fine me again."

Miller said sadly: "Max, have I not warned you? If we cannot take care of the children, the government will step in."

"Again the government! Was that the reason you used to talk to Hymie, so that the government should take care of him while your Moe stays at home and crawls into bed—?"

"Max!"

Kahn's reddish eyes became terrifyingly small. "My Rose against that whore!"

The old man went white. He drew himself erect. "Max, that is all. She is my son's wife. I will not have it!"

Without another word, he walked firmly across the yard and into the house. As he stepped into the kitchen, he met Rose. She rushed into his arms. A terrible pang stabbed through him. He had never felt so close to this plain, mild, suffering girl as at this moment when disaster threatened the long close friendship of the two families.

She broke into uncontrollable weeping. "Papa is awful. He got into another fight with Dominick. He says he's going to put him in jail for that bad check he signed with your name. Dominick beat up his wife and called her a Jew-lover. I just can't say anything to papa. Uncle Israel, please, please talk to him."

He held her to strengthen her for the blow. "Your father says I talk too much. He is right. I have come to the end of my talking."

Her soft shoulders shook. Her father called. Stifling her sobs, she went out with her hands to her bulging eyes.

His head against the doorpost, Miller watched her cross to the car, casting a despairing look around. In the field the voices of the cutters rose. She grasped at the door handle. Her father spoke sharply to her and pulled her in beside him. The Packard shot out into the road. A pillar of dust floated in the air and slowly dissolved.

Miller went to his wife. She lay in their bed, her head making a small nest in the pillow. Her arched nose and her cheeks were bloodless. "Why didn't Rose stay any longer?" she whispered.

"She has her own pack to carry."

"But Max, he could have come up for a minute."

"There are other things he could have done," he muttered. He started pacing the floor.

She closed her eyes and rolled her head from side to side, and after a while she asked once more about the Kahns. He gave her an evasive answer. She would find out soon enough, and he realized with a sinking heart that to hold on to their son, this friendship, which had cost and given him so much, would have to be broken, finally, irrevocably.

The air of the room burned. He brought his hand to his forehead; it was bathed in sweat. He saw his wife's large eyes on him, full of misery and foreboding. He placed his palms gently over them. "Sleep, sleep."

He tiptoed through the hall to the other room, to the window facing the field. The gang was still at lunch. Only Moe was cutting. Left hand seizing the plants, right hand bringing the hatchet down, the son went his masterful way down the rows, felling the plants and dropping them slantwise to wilt in the sun. Long after he had vanished behind

the mass of green, the thud of his cutting resounded in the air.

The old man resumed his pacing. He had no one to blame but himself for the tragic situation. How could he blame his wife? The apple of her father's eye, the youngest daughter of the first cantor of the synagogue, she had been snatched from her family's bosom when she was still attending school. What had she known of life, this sheltered, lovely girl, who had been flattered by the attentions of a man twice her age and swept off her feet by his eloquence and gallantry? With all her faults and whims and caprices, she had been a good wife, sharing with him the hardships of those years when like Jacob he could say, "Thus I was: in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep fled from mine eyes." And she had become dearer to him, having given him a son for these times—tough as a bull, short-tempered, morose, single-minded as a monk, so utterly unlike her, unlike himself, so utterly unlike the handsome, hard-riding Absalom of a Hyman, whose death, like a lightning flash, had revealed to him how close he, too, had come to losing that which gives life its dignity and worth, its immortality.

His heart was wrung for Rose. For years he had dreamed of her becoming his daughter. He had fooled himself too long; in no respect was she the woman for his son. How fortunate that towards the end he had not forced his wishes on the boy, repeating Max's disastrous mistake. No, not by pressing men hard, but by handing them the greatest measure of freedom, do you hold them.

As he kept pacing back and forth, he heard footsteps below. Thinking it was Anton, he bitterly regretted that

he had not gone to the shack and drunk a *schnapps* with the Bartasus. He bent at the window. The field was empty, the evening shadows lay across its face. There was a knock. Esther sat up in bed fearfully. "Who is it?"

"It's Mary."

She flung herself back in bed.

"It's Mary, Mrs. Miller."

The old man remained rooted in the center of the room. He said at last, "Esther, our son's wife."

She picked at the sheet.

There was another knock.

"Israel," she moaned, "no, no!"

He sat down beside her. In the stifling darkness, her hands clutched his, her fingernails in her anguish biting into his flesh.

Miller had always said that man should not be happy among those who weep; should not weep among those who are happy; should not sleep among those who are awake; should not be awake among the sleepy; should not sit among those that stand, and should not stand among those that are seated. In brief, a man should always be one with the people. Now he was cut off, alone, and this loneliness was more than he could bear.

Toward morning, attending to her needs, he said gently, "Esther, I have decided."

Her eyes opened drearily.

"Esther, we have nothing left but our son. We must not lose him."

"Will you bring that—that *shicksa* in?" Her breathing became labored. "Is that your plan? That *shicksa*?"

"His wife, you mean."

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She twisted her hands. Her shift loosened and revealed her breasts, white in their purity and as small as though she had never suckled child.

"She has lived with Jews, has she not?" He could not forebear the joke. "You will make a good *Yiddinne* out of her."

Her teeth raked her lips. "Are you mad?"

"Yes, wife. Mad with being alone, mad with grief that we have not shared his joy, danced at his wedding, our only child's."

Since Moe had taken the farm over, she had noticed changes in Miller. He had become as stubborn as the boy, was beginning to act as if he no longer feared to tax his weakened heart and the eye whose sight he was slowly losing. He had even told her yesterday that under no circumstances would he call on any other doctor than Blumenthal to tend to her and himself. Hysteria and tears had not budged him.

In her terror, she clung to him, the one strong stick of her life. Her arms were around him; something told her this time he was far beyond the reach of her body. "You are mad, mad."

"Then God is mad. Boaz took a gentile wife, and her name was Ruth."

She wept while he sat beside her, holding her hand. After a while her cries lessened. When he heard her even breathing, thinking she was asleep, he went downstairs.

In the mirror he looked at himself—peddler, teacher, farmer, everything and nothing. The unfailing sense of humor, which had as its source his ability to see his failings in the most difficult moments of his life, asserted itself.

"Oh, you dry gray ram," he said, "with half your brains butted away." Briskly he shaved and washed and put on a fresh shirt.

When he came out on the porch, he stiffened as if a spear had been plunged into his bowels. In the upper part of the house the bitter, helpless weeping started. He drew a deep painful breath. Back and forth he walked. Soon, he promised himself, soon he would set out across the fields.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHEN MOE RETURNED WITH THE BUCKET OF KNIVES, after having spoken to his father, Mary was waiting for him in the field. In spite of the night, she looked as fresh and sturdy as a bull's-eye daisy. First crack out of the box, she asked about his parents.

Powdered Mrs. Foley was there with enough strong perfume to knock a man down. Moe took Mary behind the horse-rig. He put his hands on her shoulders and explained in a few words what had happened. He could see that she had expected more from him.

"But we got no time, Mary. Let's get through with the cuttin. Then we'll figure out the whole blamed business. The old man can take care of himself. If he needs me, I'm around."

"And your mother?"

"What do you mean—and my mother? I mean my mother, too."

The strong bones in her face showed. "When people talk

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about you, they don't mean me. Your mother's a woman. She's got feelings of her own."

"If there's somethin she needs, like the doctor or the store, I'll go for her. That's all. But I don't go on my belly or slobber around her or any other woman!"

Mary's gray eyes blazed, and she pulled away from him. He wheeled abruptly and left her behind the rig. He cooled off enough in a while to recognize that again he hadn't figured her out right. Once a girl, worth her salt, threw herself under a man, she didn't give herself entirely to him. Always there would be something held back to go after. Always he would have to sweat to keep her regard and see her side. By God, she would keep him stepping more than all the leaf he would ever raise.

Because Anton was still cocked from the wedding drinks, Moe had to work in the shed. Mary took charge of the spearing. He half expected her to nurse a grudge. That was his mother's way. But she drove in on the horse-rig to see if he needed help with the hanging. She smiled up at him. The eyes, which could narrow, grow hard as steel and blaze, were soft and clean of every trace of anger.

They worked together the rest of the day at the hanging and spearing. After supper at Mrs. Foley's, they returned to give Mary more practice in spearing. To make up for the quarrel, he was patient and easy with her. When he saw her fumbling for a smoke, he made her sit down on the rigging and lit the cigarette for her. He was content to file the tobacco knives and listen to her.

She broke off the talk and rose, stroking her dress down. She asked if he cared to go see his folks for a minute. He pressed his lips together and went on filing.

"They must be terribly lonesome," she said. "They miss you, Moey."

He shrugged his shoulders and looked down from the ridge, where they had been cutting, into the yard as still as a well in the evening.

She went alone. He watched her dress sail around the full brown calves of her legs. He shook his head. God damn it, he could see no end to this.

Mary returned in a few minutes. She was pale. Serve her right. She saw his look, threw her head back, and they resumed the spearing.

Moe stuck his lath into a slot in the horse and tipped the lath with the spear. He pierced six plants through the stalk. "Don't show off," she said quietly. He was spearing with one hand, one of the few men around who could do it. He grinned and laid both hands on the plants. She took his place. She didn't split a single stalk now. Boy, she was strong and fast and willing, this red-head of his.

They walked back to her home in the twilight. She lagged behind. He turned to wait for her, seeing that again she was troubled. She met his eye, and she said: "Don't do this thing for your mother or your dad. Do it for yourself and me. For us, my husband."

His jaw fell, and he cursed helplessly.

Mary tilted her head back and laughed to see this big, blobber-lipped man staring at her like a little boy, bewildered by the variety of her attack. She took his arm and jerked her knee up against the back of his and made him stumble.

They went through the nettles and crossed the brook. The air was thick, damp, and cool. A quail whistled. A bull-

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frog worked a heavy rasp. They entered the lot where the shack stood. Moe went ahead to see if the Bartasus would be in condition for work tomorrow.

The door of the shack was open. In the dim interior the small red eye of a cigarette glowed. Anton was panting on his cot. "Ah, my druh. Come in. It's Moe, Ruby."

Moe backed out, colliding with Mary. She struggled with him, slipped into the grass and covered her face with her hands. He tried to raise her. She leaped up, thrusting him aside. He followed her. There was not a word between them.

She went to bed immediately, while he rolled himself a cigar under the catalpa. Cripes, why should she get so hot and bothered about that mother of hers? Better that Mrs. Foley should hook on with Anton than be taken by any old dick in the country.

He scratched his head in vexation, snuffed in the tobacco-saturated air. Slowly his face brightened. He went down the bank to the barn.

A plan had been revolving in his mind. Mrs. Foley had not paid taxes for years, and there had been talk of the town selling her farm. He would take it off her hands. He would need a place of his own even if he kept renting his father's farm to give the old man a living. It would take time to get these Foley fields back in shape. There was good pasture. The barn was all right. He knew of a number of dairy farmers up the line who were auctioning off their stock and running into the factories. Cows and chickens would please Mary. There was nothing like cow manure for tobacco land.

Moe entered the house, full of his plan. He bent over the

bed and touched Mary. She made no move. He whispered her name. She seemed fast asleep. Reluctantly he went to the window to finish his cigar.

Someone was climbing the bank. He could make out Mrs. Foley's big figure. She came into the room without knocking. "I knew you wasn't asleep. I could smell your cigar, Moe. Anton is comin tomorrow. We was over to the pheasant farm, and that Martin promised a hand for as long as you need him." She walked up to the wall. "There's a coupla pictures I want off the wall. Been so busy I ain't had the chance, and that Anton Tony drunk as a bedbug."

Mary sat up in bed. "Will you get out, ma?"

"I'm tryin to help."

"All right. Get out!"

"Keep your shirt on, Mary." Mrs. Foley gave her deep mannish laugh. "I'll have to broom this out tomorrow. If there's somethin you want, Moe, just ask for it. A man don't ask, gets left. Say, ain't Anton a card?"

"Will you get out or do you want me to invite you to bed?"

Nothing stumped the woman. "There's worse beds than Moe Miller's to put my shoes under. You thank your stars for bein lucky, Mary."

Mary jumped out of bed and closed the door after her. "Oh, she knows her men, my darling mother. She'll blow you up, soft-soap you, and you'll grow fat as a hog on it. After a while you'll get stuck here, you'll like it so much."

Moe's face burned. He stammered, "If she don't interfere with a man——"

"If you were a man, you'd settle with your folks. We'd be staying with them."

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He stubbed his cigar and took his shoes off. Turning her back to him, she said, "You don't have to be in such a cast-iron hurry to get to bed."

His resolution to let her make the first move vanished. She was as slippery as June grass, as slippery as the suckers he used to snare as a kid in the brook where he had first seen her. She seemed to yield, doubled up, and stung him with a bite. Almost at the same instant, with a cry, she pressed his head wildly against her breasts.

He marveled at this girl. She had had other lovers, was as outspoken as a man, but no sooner had she become his wife than she was as moody and demanding as his mother. A woman in her season went through all shapes and stages; in your very arms, you couldn't be sure what baffling body she would pop at you. Fiercely Moe thrust off her scented little handkerchief and pinned her beneath him.

Mrs. Foley woke him next morning. It was late. He dressed quickly, letting Mary sleep on. He went out into the dew-soaked grass and, stretching, saw that it would be another great cutting and curing day. Mrs. Foley brought him a clean towel. She poured coffee and set a stack of pancakes before him.

She sat opposite him, brushed and done up, a rouged spot on each cheek, as if a paw had slapped them, her lips as red as salmon. Her bold eyes passed over him. She said admiringly, "You're a big man, bigger than Stevey, and he was no short measure." She sighed. "Frankie, that Eyetalian lad, he was okay, but city boys ain't got the heft and last. Steve always said that. He was born on a farm in the old country. He come here and worked on a farm in Maine before he bought this place. Now Stevey could speak out." She low-

ered her voice to a whisper. "A man's got to, Moe. You'll learn that with Mary."

She was talking Steve when he left.

With the help of Anton and one-eyed Martin, who exchanged significant looks when Moe hove into sight, he hung up the tobacco. Then the three cut. While they were at it, the Foleys, with young Harry Horton and two of his sisters, appeared.

Mary strained up on her toes and kissed Moe eagerly. He thought he saw the damned question in her eyes, and it amused her to watch him set himself in his characteristic way, legs apart, feet planted solidly, to take a blow and return it.

"Moe," she said, "you think I'm a nag, don't you?"

That knocked the wind out of him.

"I worked with a Swede in that broker's house I told you about. She was the housekeeper. She was an old battle-axe, sharp as sauce, and bossy. But all the help liked her. She used to say, 'Kid, don't ever be a bitch, a cat, or a nag. The nag is worse than all.' Keep me from being a nag, Moey."

With a smile she put her finger to the trademark she had sunk into his swarthy cheek. "What were you going to tell me last night, dear?"

His lips twitched at the way she had turned the tables on him. He tested the edge of his knife with the thick ball of his thumb. Finally he looked into her eyes. "I got some plans I wanted to tell you," he said.

She nodded encouragingly.

"We go over tonight to see the old man. Both families is in it." Afraid he had said too much, he thrust the knife

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brusquely into her hands. "Finish my row. I'll get the kids started."

She gripped the knife and stared at him, going lightly and quickly for a man his size down the field, his shoulders broad as all outdoors, the engineman's cap yanked down over that eagle nose of his. "Look, world, look at my old man," she whispered, and then such a surge of relief came over her at the way things were working out that she had to bite her lips to keep from shouting.

She was content for the moment to watch him and the kids, to breathe in deeply the morning air, to stare at the great plants crowding every hill. She was bruised and felt a little tired. She reddened at her thought, and then she started. Those two lame roosters, the Bartasus and one-eyed Martin, were coming near, gabbing away in Polish, their hatchet-shaped knives falling and rising in rhythm. She whipped around and began cutting ahead of them.

CHAPTER XXIX

MARY SAW THE OLD MAN FIRST. "MOE!" SHE CRIED.

Moe was dead to everything but his spearing.

"Moe!" she cried again. She dropped her spear and ran stumblingly across the field.

The old man smiled as she flew into his arms. "May I kiss my son's wife?" he asked gallantly. He took her face in his hands and kissed her on the forehead.

The work at the first spearing horse stopped. Moe stood

motionless. Mrs. Foley gulped. The kids shook hands excitedly. "Dog's blood," cackled Anton.

With her arm through his, a proud, defiant look in her eyes, Mary led the old man to the spearing horse.

"My son." Miller's voice broke. He put his hand to his lips as if he were going to turn a page. "My son, I have come to thank you for giving us such a daughter."

He took Moe's black paw. "This, Mary, is a big hard hand, which you will feel in one way or another, but there will always be a man behind it."

Moe's unwinking gaze broke. He looked down at his father's pale hand lost in his. His lips drooped, and he flushed painfully.

The old man stepped back. His shiny bluchers, his white shirt, his curled mustache gave him some of the jaunty appearance of the man who had once been the wit and life of his community. His voice was still uncertain. "You are having fine tobacco weather. Tell me, do you have enough help?"

"Not enough," said Moe, "but we'll manage."

Mrs. Foley said, "Mr. Miller, Anna is comin tomorrow to help. Her man's got a day off."

He went to her, his hands spread apologetically. "Excuse me, dear neighbor. Ah, wouldn't Stevey be happy to see our children."

The big red-faced woman nodded. She eyed Moe, and there was genuine liking in her look. "Yeh, Stevey'd been glad. He used to say it'd take four good men to fill Moe's pants."

The laughter broke the tension. Moe reddened, frowned, and joined in the laughter. With her hand on his spearing

horse, Mary saw to it that the old man had all the time in the world to straighten himself out.

"Everything," he said, "is for the best. *Gam zoo l'tovo*, as they say in the old language. I learned to start the pump. Yes, I am also becoming a mechanic. We'll fix Hitler's wagon," he joked.

"Cholera take that Herod!" shouted Anton.

Wearing his cutaway cap with pins, buttons, flags, enough metal to sink a battleship, Cooky yipped, "Let's get the lead out, Pop Miller. We got plenty work."

"Yes, to the work. I want to look at the shed. Tomorrow I'll help. Tonight, after work, you are all invited. We will have a little *schnapps*. It is never too late to sing and dance."

"Never, Old Testament," cried Anton gleefully, leading the way to the shed.

With a grin Moe watched the two go. Then he reared. The sun was hot. He would have to break his hump to keep the plants from burning. He pulled off his shirt. He changed his spear. He looked around to see that every man was in place—handlers, loaders, drivers. He planted himself solidly beside his spearing horse.

Mary was crossing the field. She had spotted a few loose leaves. She gave him a smile, the strong sweet bones showing in her face. As she moved quickly to her gang, he saw how her sturdy knees boosted up her dress like the track of his "cat."

Moe turned. He stretched. His muscles leaped as if they were oiled beneath his skin. He snatched a lath. It twirled and cut the air. The plants flew into his hands, and he plunged the stalks against his singing spear.

Gay, bookish Israel Miller should have been a country rabbi, a friend and counsellor of his community, but he has chosen to raise broadleaf tobacco, and his farm is a failure. Moe, his only son, just turned twenty as the story opens, is a born farmer and broadleaf is in his blood. He is a man of few words—all of them hard, all of them honest. He tells his father he is going to take over the farm, and he does so. He knows that being boss will mean taking all the risks, doing all the planning, working in the fields from ten to twenty hours a day when the weather permits, and doing outside work with his tractor to earn money to pay his field helpers. But to grim young Moe a decision is in the nature of a manic obsession and his Decision No. 1 is to make a success of the farm. His Decision No. 2 is of course to liquidate any—

body or anything that gets in the way of No. 1.

Since Mary Foley, a disintegrating, red-headed Polish-Irish helper in the fields, comes to be a menace to No. 1, Moe has to do something about it. What Moe does and how he does it, what his orthodox father and mother think and do, and how Mary and her engagingly disreputable family conduct themselves in the circumstances, make the story.

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